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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

# **The Middle-Eastern Cold War: The Religious Struggle Between The Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia And The Islamic Republic Of Iran**

By Omar Zein

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## **Abstract**

The Middle East has witnessed in the past two decades an increase in the number of internal conflicts within many states. Many of those internal conflicts had developed into a religious strife between Sunnis and Shi'as. Today in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain there is an ongoing conflicts between representatives of both sects; whether it is a state or transnational actors. The Middle East has not witnessed a struggle between the two most popular sects of Islam since the Ottoman-Safavid war in 16<sup>th</sup> century.

To analyze the cause behind the rise in conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites; there must be an examination of the states and religious actors that contributed to the rise of this conflict. Therefore, this paper attempts to study each of Saudi Arabia and Iran; as they had played a large role in supporting Islamist movements in the Middle East.

The relationship between both Saudi Arabia and Iran before the Islamic Revolution had managed to stabilize the relationship between Sunnis and Shi'as. However, a change of the Iranian regime's identity and its Shiite Islamization had sparked a tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Later, the conflict between both states had moved into other states such as Syria, Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen. In order to analyze the impact of religious identity on the struggle between the two states; the paper examines each states' identity formation, their linkage to other religious Islamist movement and how it contributed to an increase in internal conflicts in the Middle East.

**Abbreviations:**

AQI- Al Qaeida in Iraq

MB- Muslim Brotherhood

IFL- Islamic Front for Liberation

ISIS- Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

ISIL- Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

MWL- Muslim World League

OIC- Organization for Islamic Conference

*Chapter II*  
**Introduction**

*I. Origins of the Conflict*

Not since the Ottoman-Persian wars has the Middle East witnessed any major conflict between the Shiites and Sunnis; even though this main division within Islam for centuries has been a source of conflict in the Middle East; since the First Fitna War between Ali Bin Abu Talib and Muw'ayyia.

Today there are two regional powers in the Middle-East each presenting itself as a stronghold for Islam; Iran as a Shiite stronghold and Saudi Arabia as a Sunni (particulary Salafi) stronghold. The relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia from 1923 to 1979 for most period of that time was exceptionally good; as both states had cooperated in many issues such as oil, maintaining stability in the Gulf Islands and the containment of Communism and Nasserism.<sup>1</sup> However, all this changed in 1979 when the Islamists (Islamic Clerics) managed to rule Iran after a popular revolution that managed to oust Shah Mohamed Reza. The rise of Ayatollah Khomeini to power saw a quick deterioration of both countries' bilateral relationship as the Saudis feared the growing Iranian influence in the region.

i. The Iranian Revolution and the threat to the Security of the Gulf :

The new Islamic Republic of Iran tried to export its own revolution to other Islamic States; encouraging Islamists and especially Shi'as to revolt against their leaders. This

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<sup>1</sup> Badeeb, Saeed M. *Saudi-Iranian Relations, 1932-1982*. London: Centre for Arab and Iranian Studies and Echoes, 1993..

was clearly evident in Ayatollah Khomeini's ideology as he thought to spread 'Islamic Revolutions' across the Middle East; as he once said "Our movement is for an Islamic goal, not for Iran alone.. Iran has [only] been the starting point".<sup>2</sup>

The Iranians had influenced the Shiites to revolt against the Saudi monarchy; which led to a seven day uprising in the city of Qatif in 1979. In addition, the Iranians were using hajj as a political theater in order to promote its leadership in the Islamic World and to discomfort the Saudi authorities. Later on in 1981, there was an attempted coup by the Iranian sponsored Islamic Front for Liberation (IFL) of Bahrain against the Bahraini monarchy.<sup>3</sup>

ii. Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf War:

Saudi Arabia, threatened by Iran's rise in the region and threatening its own identity and regime's stability, had allied itself with Saddam Hussein and supported his war against Iran. In 1980, Saudi Arabia took the lead in mobilizing Arab financial support for Iraq and contributed into a US\$20 billion financial aid by the end of 1982.<sup>4</sup> The Saudi monarchy also moved into creating the Gulf Cooperation Council in order to contain the Iraqi power, Iranian hegemony and radical Islam. The funding of Wahhabi movements such as Al Qaeda in the 1980s had as well managed to repel other Shiite movements in

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<sup>2</sup> Menashri, David. *Post-revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society, and Power*. London: Frank Cass, 2001..

<sup>3</sup> Louër, Laurence. *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008.33-45

<sup>4</sup> Furtig, Henner. *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia between the Gulf Wars*. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2002.



both Pakistan and Afghanistan and thus limited the influence of Iranian clerics.<sup>5</sup> Saudi Arabia had by the end of the First Gulf War weakened Iran and diminished its chance of exporting its own revolution.

iii. The Fall of Afghanistan and Iraq and the rise of the Shiite Crescent

Saudi Arabia's containment of Iran in the Gulf War only lasted for a decade and the political changes in the region managed to play to the advantage of Iran. The United States in a retaliation for the September 9/11 attacks declared a war on terror and invading Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003; ousting two regimes (Al Taliban and Saddam Hussein) that were considered also Iran's arch rivals. Hence, Iran's influence in the region had again started to rise; it was able to fund Sunni Islamic movements such as Hamas in Palestine, Shiite Islamic movements as Hezbollah in Lebanon and its increasing influence in Iraq as its first government had a majority of Shiite. Saudi Arabia and its allies such as Jordan and Egypt felt threatened from the rising power of the Iranian regime. In late 2004, King Abdallah of Jordan explained his concern to the rise of "Shia crescent" that extended from Damascus to Tehran, passing through Baghdad, where a Shia-dominated government had taken power.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mervin, Sabrina. *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran*. London: Saqi, 2010.29-45

<sup>6</sup> Black, Ian. "Fear of a Shia Full Moon." *The Guardian*. January 26, 2007. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jan/26/worlddispatch.ianblack>.

iv. The Arab Spring and the rise of Conflict:

The Arab Spring has worsened the struggle between the two regional powers in the Middle East. This had led some scholars often to describe their struggle as the new Middle Eastern Cold War. An example of this struggle could be further examined in Bahrain, Syria and Iraq.

Bahrain had witnessed its own uprising in February 2011 when thousands of peaceful protestors marched to Pearl Square in Manama demanding political reform and the removal of King Hamad Bin Khalifa. The House of Khalifa has ruled the Kingdom of Bahrain since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Bahrain has witnessed a power struggle between the Shi'ite majority and the ruling Sunni minority ever since its independence in 1971. As previously mentioned before, Iran had attempted to overthrow the Bahraini monarchy in 1981; however the coup failed. Bahrain is currently a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council and a major Saudi ally.

Syria, similar to Bahrain, has witnessed its own uprisings in mid-March 2011 when many protests erupted throughout the country demanding the removal of Bashar Al Assad. The Arab Republic of Syria has been under control of the Assad family since 1970 and had witnessed an Islamists rebellion in the late 1970's and the early 1980's that was crushed later by Hafez El Assad. Similar to Bahrain, the minority Alawites rules the majority Sunni.

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003; Iran had managed to help the Shiites in ruling Iraq. Iraq has however been unstable since the removal of Saddam Hussein and had witnessed a civil war between different ethno-sectarian communities and has been

witnessing a lot of tensions post the Arab Spring between the Sunnis and Shias and there is a possibility with the increasing influence of Islamic State in Syria and Levant (ISIL) that the Iraq may go through another civil war; as the Sunnis are extremely unhappy with the Shiite control over the country.

## *II. Research Question:*

Since the 1950s, there has been a struggle for supremacy among the Arabs in the Middle East. In the 1950s and 1960s; the struggle was between Egypt and Saudi- Arabia. Egypt couldn't win this struggle against the Saudi monarchy and therefore between the 1970s till the 1990s various states had tried to fill the void that Egypt had left (especially after its complete isolation from the Arab world); Syria, Iraq, Iran and recently Qatar and Turkey are among those that had challenged Saudi Arabia for supremacy.

Yet, with the wave of change hitting the Middle East because of the Arab Spring; it is clearly evident now that the ongoing battle for supremacy is now between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both states have been battling to gain more influence in the region; hence engaging in a religious war. Both Iran and Saudi are struggling to become the center of the Islamic World; as J.D Anthony explains "The Riyadh regime has been and remains profoundly disturbed by the Sunni-Shiite character of the war...on the sectarian level, Saudi Arabia is especially concerned about the potential of the Tehran government to undermine the Kingdom's regional role"<sup>7</sup> While Iranian Minister of Defense Ahmed Vahidi has further linked Iran's soft power with Islam "Our soft war power is much more

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<sup>7</sup> Furtig, Henner. *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia between the Gulf Wars*. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2002.

than enemy's since Islam and our beliefs are our backbone, and this backbone is the strongest in the world"<sup>8</sup> As a result; most of the states that had been affected by the Arab Spring had experienced a period of instability and unrest; with bloodshed being common in most states. In the same period, we have been witnessing a power struggle between regional and global powers; as they have been all struggling to further increase their interests in the region.

*The main question of the proposed thesis is: What is the main drive that created the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia? The sub questions are:*

- *How did both Iran and Saudi Arabia use religion to maintain religious legitimacy domestically and internationally?*
- *How did the struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran affect Arab countries during the Arab Spring?*

### *III. Hypothesis:*

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran pre-1979 revolution as explained earlier was mentioned before exceptionally well; however the deterioration of the relationship between the two states occurred when Iran became an 'Islamic State'. Before the Islamic Revolution, the Saudi monarchy and the Shah of Iran got along earlier well even though the two states belonged to two different sects of Islam.

Since the end of the second Gulf War, Iran had been heavily relying on ideology and religion in order to protect the regime's legitimacy and to achieve its revolutionary goal

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<sup>8</sup> "Defense Minister Reiterates Iran's High Soft Power." *Fars News Agency*. N.p., 4 December. 2012. 10

of becoming the sole Islamic power in the regime. This would also explain its interest in acquiring nuclear technology, its anti-Western rhetoric and its support for Islamist movements that are hostile to Israel. However, even though the Iranian regime claims to be supporting all Islamist movements, whether Sunni or Shiite; its support for the secular regime instead of the Sunni Islamists movements in Syria defies such a claim.

Consequently, Iran's support for Assad's regime is because of the Assad's religious identity which is 'Alawism'; an offshoot sect of Shi'ism.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is probably the first state to adopt a pan-Islamist agenda since the abolishment of the Ottoman Caliphate. The Saudi monarchy had been using the Wahhabi Ideology since the 1960s in order to prevent revolutionary ideologies such as Communism, Pan-Arabism and Khomeini's revolutionary ideas from spreading throughout the Middle East and for protecting its own legitimacy and status as the sole representative of the Islamic World. Saudi Arabia had been the major supporter in the past few decades of radical Sunni Islamic movements such as Al Taliban, Al Qaida, Liwa Al Islam in Syria in order to counter any foreign influence notably that of Iran, and at the same time maintain its own interests in the region.

As both Saudi Arabia and Iran have been using religion to increase their influence in the Middle East, the current wave of instability resulting from the Arab Spring intensified the rivalry between the two countries. Since 2011, both states have been involved in the uprisings in Bahrain, Syria and Iraq where they posed against each other using religion as a primary tool of conflict. The Sunni population in both Iraq and Syria are currently unsatisfied with the Shiite and Alawite rule in Iraq and Syria and the Shiite majority in Bahrain have tried to rebel against the Sunni monarchy. The two powers are keen not

only to protect their interests in the region but also to harm one another, and therefore, entering into a second cold war in the Middle East. The first Cold War was between Saudi Arabia and Nasser's Egypt.

Therefore, both Iran and Saudi Arabia have been since the outbreak of the Iranian revolution of 1979 competing for being the role of leadership among Muslim. Saudi Arabia already defines itself as the "Heartland of Islam" and sees itself "a leader in the pursuit of worldwide Islamic solidarity"<sup>9</sup> The state of Saudi Arabia seeks to be "committed to preserving the Islamic tradition in all areas of government and society"<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's image has been undermined by Iran. In 1987 Ali Khamenei claimed that there is no war between Sunnis and Shi'as; rather "This is a lie! Of course there is a war; but a war between the American perception of Islam and true revolutionary Islam"<sup>11</sup>

#### *IV. Conceptual Framework:*

The proposed thesis will be analyzed by using a mixed conceptual framework by relying mainly on constructivism theory and the role of religion in international relations.

##### i. Constructivism: The social Construction of Power Politics:

Constructivist theory offers a new alternative to international relations that has been dominated by realists and liberalists in the past few decades. Constructivism concentrates

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<sup>9</sup> "Saudi Arabia: Islam's Heartland." *Saudi Arabia: Islam's Heartland*. Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Washington, n.d. Web. 13 Nov. 2013.

<sup>10</sup> "Saudi Arabia: Islam's Heartland." *Saudi Arabia: Islam's Heartland*. Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Washington, n.d. Web. 13 Nov. 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Kramer, Martin S. *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996..

on issues of identity in world politics and the theorization of domestic politics and culture in international relations theory.<sup>12</sup>

Alexander Wendt argues that anarchy is what states make of it; meaning that the realist argument of self-help is due to process; not the structure and therefore self-help and power politics are institutions and not essential features of anarchy. The distribution of power, according to Wendt, may always affect states' calculations, but how it does so depends on the intersubjective understandings and expectations, on the "distribution of knowledge" that constitute their conceptions of self and other.<sup>13</sup> In other words, as Ted Hopf explains the action of actors "Meaningful behavior, or action is possible only within an intersubjective social context. Actors develop their relations with, and understandings of, others through the media of norms and practices. In the absence of norms, exercises of power, or actions, would be devoid of meaning."<sup>14</sup>

According to K.M. Fierke, constructivists have highlighted several themes as they argue that international relations is a social construction. First is that the idea of social construction suggests difference across context rather than single objective reality. Therefore, constructivists seek to understand changes in relationship between states at the international level. Second, constructivists have shed light on the social dimensions of international relations; thus demonstrating the importance of norms, rules and language at this level. Lastly, constructivists have defined international politics is a 'world of our

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<sup>12</sup> Hopf, Ted. "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations." *International Security*. Pp. 171-200 23.1 (1998): 171-200..

<sup>13</sup> Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46.02 (1992): 391.

<sup>14</sup> Hopf, Ted. "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations." *International Security*. 23.1 (1998): 171-200..

making'; as they have introduced the possibility of agency and have emphasized process of interaction, as the actor makes choices are made through the process of interacting with each other and thus enters history, culture and political distinct reality into being.

<sup>15</sup>Furthermore, Wendt argues about the importance of identity and interests in changing the states policies and the structure of the system. According to Wendt, actors acquire identities, by participating in such collective meanings. For the actors, each identity is inherently social definition of the actor; which affects the perspective of actors about themselves and therefore constitutes the structure of the social world. Therefore, identities are the basis of interests; they define their interest in the process of defining situations. Wendt adds that institutions can have an effect into bringing new identities and interests and gave an example of the European states new identity after the cold war.

Wendt identifies three security systems that seek to explain the relationship between states; the competitive security system, the individualistic security system and the cooperative security system.

- Competitive Security System: States identify negatively with each other's security and therefore an actor's gain is seen as another's loss.
- Individualistic Security System: in which states are indifferent to the relationship between their own and others security.
- Cooperative security system: in which states identify positively with one another so that the security of each is perceived as the responsibility of all actors.

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<sup>15</sup> Dunne, Timothy, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013..



Lastly, Wendt argues that actors respond towards an object on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them. States act differently toward enemies than they do toward friends because enemies are threatening and friends are not.

Identity politics is very important in the Middle East. The first Middle Eastern Cold War between Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the late 1950's and early 1960's can be viewed as a struggle between Islamism and Arab Nationalism. The Iranian revolution had an impact on changing the relationship of Iran with the entire Islamic world; as the change from a secular to a revolutionary Islamist regime had been welcome as well as it threatened many states and movements. The Iranian Islamist regime at the time had a vision of spreading Islamic revolutions all over the Middle East and had directly challenged the Saudi monarchy that views itself as a Pan-Islamist leader.

However, there are some limitations to the constructivist approach. Stefano Guzzini argues that constructivism is considered eclectic and redundant. It is eclectic in the sense that many constructivists use their own version of constructivism without taking into consideration the final theoretical outcome. While it is also redundant because it adds some amendments to already existing approaches.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the constructivist approach doesn't concentrate much on power as realists and therefore takes into little consideration the economic and military factors. Ronan Plan argues that the constructivist argument places 'ideas' as the most important change factor in order and international

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<sup>16</sup> Guzzini, Stefano. "A Reconstruction of Constructivism." *European Journal of International Relations* 6, no. 2 (2000): 148-50. Accessed December 14, 2014.  
<http://ejt.sagepub.com.library.aucegypt.edu:2048/content/6/2/147.full.pdf.html>.

system can be empirically and methodologically proven wrong; as the material interests override ideology.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, it would be very difficult to explain the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran using other international relation theories such as realism and liberalism. As Paul Kowert argues, both theories are unable to explain for the reasons for the widespread of violence in the region that doesn't serve either national interest or Mammon. Furthermore, both theories are problem-solving theories that place a special focus on basic human need, material interests and security.<sup>18</sup> Whereas constructivism places special emphasis on identity, as Kowert states, "Identity is the medium through which national leaders and ordinary citizens alike translate recognition of similarity and difference (in threat, capabilities, and so on) into ontological statements about international relation"<sup>19</sup>

However, taking into consideration the limitations of the constructivist approach, the thesis will use a similar approach that Ted Hopf used in his book 'Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies'. The author uses constructivism in his analysis to explain Soviet and Russian foreign policies. The author uses domestic factors in order to producing "a thin cognitive account of identity that is thickly inductive and empirical" Accordingly, his book provides "an account of how a state's domestic identities constitute a social cognitive structure that makes threats and opportunities,

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<sup>17</sup> Palan, Ronen. "A World of Their Making: An Evaluation of the Constructivist Critique in International Relations." *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 4 (2000): 575-98.

<sup>18</sup> Kowert, Paul. *The Peril and Promise of Constructivism Theory*. Ritsumeikan University. March 1, 2001. 158

<sup>19</sup> Ibid ,165

enemies and allies, intelligible, thinkable, and possible"<sup>20</sup> This would be the most suitable way, as will be proven later, to analyze the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia and how it affects the Middle East in terms of ideological influence.

ii. Religion in International Relations:

This particular part will cover the importance of religion in international relations and explain the importance of religion for policy makers to gain legitimacy internally and externally. However, in order to understand why both states are acting in hostility towards each other; the thesis will use the suggested approach of Rebecca Glazier in which it is going to tackle “the nature of religious beliefs, the content of religious beliefs, and how these beliefs are connected to real events in a way that motivates believers to take political action.”<sup>21</sup> This method will be used to explain the Wahhabism and Shiism and their relevance towards state policies.

Religion has been in general largely ignored by social scientist and in particular international relation theorists. Fox and Sandler argue that secularism and modernity theories are the main reason behind the foundation of international relations on the basis of rejecting religion as a mean for understanding society. This is a mistake that western policy makers and scholars usually make when studying and analyzing the Middle East and hence they are often surprised by political events that are ignited by religious motives; as Robert Wuthnow further explains “If the Middle East continues to produce

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<sup>20</sup> Hopf, Ted. *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002. Print..3

<sup>21</sup> Durward, Rosemary, and Lee Marsden. *Religion, Conflict and Military Intervention*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009..

surprises, these surprises are not simply failings in the capacity of our theories to predict the location and timing of the next political crisis. They are instead surprises that betray a deeper bewilderment and confusion. We do not understand when a Muslim leader (i.e. Ayatollah Khomeini) calls the United States the “infidel”...We do not understand because our theories provide no basis from which to understand”<sup>22</sup>

It is also important as well to understand the relationship between civil wars and religion. Religion matters as it can influence the identities and loyalties of the players in the conflict and can influence the political goals of the combatant parties as well. According to empirical evidence, from 1940-2010, 44 religious wars occurred out of 135 civil wars; 27 of the civil wars had religion as a central element.<sup>23</sup>

iii. Topic Relation in Regards to the Two Mentioned Theories:

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran had taken a dramatic change after the Iranian revolution and thus the thesis will use the constructivist approach in which it argues that the change in the identity of the Iranian regime led by a peoples’ revolution had led to a sore relationship with Saudi Arabia. In addition, the thesis paper will cover the importance of religious scholars/*ulama* in the policy making of both respective states domestically and internationally and how it affects the perception of the other.

The Saudi monarchy and the Iranian Ayatollahs both depend on the use of Islam for legitimacy domestically and internationally. The two states depend on religious

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas, Scott. *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-first Century*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

<sup>23</sup> Toft, Monica Duffy, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel. Shah. *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011. Print.

movements in order to promote their supremacy. Therefore, the two states' interests usually collide with each other because of their ideological differences.

Little academic research has looked into religion as a source of legitimacy or conflict in International relations. As a result, not much study has been done to understand the source of the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia and its effect on the Middle East. In order to understand the struggle between both nations; there must be a study of the history of Sunni and Shiite Islam, the importance of religious legitimacy to both Saudi Arabia and Iran and the relationship between religion and war.<sup>24</sup>

#### V. *Literature Review*

The literature review will discuss the importance of the use of Islam in foreign policies and the importance of identity politics in the Middle East and focus on both Saudi Arabia and Iran. It will also cover the state formation of both Saudi Arabia and Iran in order to show that both states are mainly dependent on religion for legitimacy and thus religious scholars usually influence decision makers. It will also cover the Shiite-Wahhabi ideology and point out the religious perspectives between the two schools of Islam. The thesis will discuss the relationship of Islam with the foreign policies of Saudi Arabia and Iran; how both states used Islam to pursue their interests. Lastly, a section will be dedicated to discuss the role of both states in the Arab Spring; how did the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia shape conflicts in both Syria and Iraq.

##### i. Identity, Islam and Pan-Islamism in IR:

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas, Scott. *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-first Century*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

In order to prove the importance of identity, Islam and Pan-Islam in International Relations; the thesis uses multiple sources that discuss the importance of identity in international relations and the Middle East. For instance, Margaret Law in 'Nationalism and Middle Eastern Identities' to show the importance of identities in the Middle East have evolved in their historical context. Law looks at identity formation in the region and its leading to a social structure in the area. Law also helps prove how identity defines politics in the Middle East and how change of identity transforms the relationship between states.<sup>25</sup> While J. Harris Proctor in his book 'Islam and International Relations' gives a historical incite about the relationship between Islam and International relations. Proctor explains the early Islamic Caliphate perception of foreign states outside the Caliphate and how it evolved during the Ottoman Caliphate. Furthermore, the book shows the importance of religion in politics in both Christianity and Islam; however it moves to discuss Islamic theory of international relations and its contemporary relevance. It later uses Nasser's Egypt as a model to show the importance of Islam in strengthening the Arab Nationalist ideology and its effect on Egyptian Foreign policy.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, Jacob Landau in his book '*Identities in International Relations*' discusses the origin of pan-Islamism in the Ottoman Empire and the different definitions of Pan-Islamism and how effective it was in achieving in the goals of the Ottoman caliphate in the Arab World and specifically focusing on the first World War. In addition, it shows how Pan-Islam had a

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<sup>25</sup> Krause, Jill, and Neil Renwick. *Identities in International Relations*. New York: St. Martin's, 1996. Print.

<sup>26</sup> Proctor, J.Harris. *Islam and International Relations*. New York: Praeger, 1965.

strong effect on the Islamic world and its people since the Ottoman Era and how it managed to achieve the interests of states such as Saudi Arabia.<sup>27</sup>

ii. Religion and the State:

In this chapter, the thesis attempts to analyze the role of religion and religious institution in the formation of the state. The chapter gives an incite of the development of political Islam in the Middle East and the Islamic World. Peter Mandville in his book *Global Political Islam* shows the importance of Islam in the Islamic World and its ability to provide political legitimacy as well as create conflicts in the region. The book shows the history of political Islamist movements, their development and their influence on the Muslim population taking into consideration the obstacles that political Islamists movements face. It particularly addresses the role of Wahhabi ulama in the Saudi state and the new challenges that Wahhabism faces domestically and internationally.<sup>28</sup> Frank Vogel discusses the formation of the Saudi state via Wahhabis and its role in foreign policy and its relation to terrorism. This covers a huge part in the identity formation of the Saudi state and gives a history of how Wahhabism contributed into the formation of the Saudi identity and the challenges that face the Wahhabi ulama in Saudi Arabia.<sup>29</sup>

iii. Religion and Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy

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<sup>27</sup> Landau, Jacob M. *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*. Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1990. Print.

<sup>28</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007

<sup>29</sup> Hefner, Robert W. *Shari'a Politics Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011..

The Al Saud monarchy has been dependent on Wahhabi ideology to shape its domestic policy through education, religious and legal institutions but there was little use of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy during the early years of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, the situation changed as communism and pan-Arabism was spreading throughout the Middle East in the late 1950's; especially rise of the charisma of Abdel Nasser and the growing role of Egypt in the Arab World had posed a threat on the Al Saud monarchy. In 1962, King Faisal had authored the 'Islamic Policy' in response to Nasser's socialism ideology and to the invasion of Yemen and thus created the World Muslim League.<sup>30</sup> The World Muslim League was a religious organization that would fund education, publication and Islamic culture centers. The WML contained members of the Muslim Brotherhood movement that were persecuted in their homeland and they were heavily influential in the movement. King Faisal had also set up another inter-governmental organization in 1969; the Organization for Islamic Conference. The Organization for Islamic Conference had the power to set up financial institutions and charities; this helped in creating movements for promoting popular assistance to Muslims. The promotion of pan-Islamism by King Faisal had managed not only to contain Arab Nationalism but it had also made Saudi Arabia a significant player regionally and internationally. Thomas Hegghammer in his book *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* illustrates the changes in Saudi foreign policy under King Fahd and its use of pan-Islamism in funding Islamic militants such as

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<sup>30</sup> Commins, David Dean. *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009.



Taliban in Afghanistan and how it had an impact on the rise of terrorism and how the use of ideology made Saudi Arabia capable of exporting its ideology.<sup>31</sup>

iv. Religion and Iranian Foreign Policy

The revolutionary change in Iran had led to a couple of major changes in Iran's foreign policy; including the creation of transnational Shia networks in Shiite areas in the Middle East and Islamic World. Sabrina Mervin in *The Shi'a World and Iran* shows the impact of the Iranian revolution on the relationship between Iran and Shiite Muslims. It discusses the similarity of identity between Iran and the Shi'a population in Asia and Africa and discusses Iran's foreign policy in relation to the majority and minority of those Shi'ites. In addition, it also shows the obstacles that Iran face in its exportation of its own ideology.<sup>32</sup> Whereas Laurence Louer in *Transnational Shia Politics illustrates* the formation of Shi'a networks in three Gulf States; Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in which it gives a brief history of their activities in the three states and the new political changes and its effect on their increased influence. It also shows the link between the Shiite networks and Iran and their political goal of achieving political autonomy; as Laurence Louer argues in this book.<sup>33</sup>

v. Struggle For Supremacy: Saudi Arabia vs Iran:

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<sup>31</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Mervin, Sabrina. *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran*. London: Saqi ;, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Louër, Laurence. *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008.

The Saudi regime has been threatened by Iran ever since its revolution in 1989; as Iran undermines the legitimacy and security of the Saudi regime. The rhetoric of the Saudi officials according to Ed Hussien, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, seemed hostile towards Iran and they were desperate for a “Again and again, and in passionate terms, Saudi political leaders were keen to stress the importance of arming Syrian opposition players, bombing Iran’s alleged nuclear facilities, and unflinchingly supporting the al-Khalifa monarchy in Bahrain.”<sup>34</sup>

The Saudi monarchy has been for the past two decades trying to diminish the Iranian influence in the Middle East by using identity and especially religion, as Hillary Leverett, former white house official says “They [Saudi Arabia] also want to portray [it as] the Iranians don’t stand for Muslim causes, beliefs, independence or nationalism...The Saudis want others in the region to see the Iranians as Shiite, Persian, non-Arab, non-Sunni...While the Saudi message is that the Shiites are infiltrating Arab affairs to undermine the Sunni community and the Sunni state.”<sup>35</sup>

Nibras Kazimi provides an early prediction in which he saw that Syria might be the place where jihadist would rise against the Syrian regime. In his book, *Syria through Jihadist eyes: the perfect enemy*: Kazimi discusses the ideological differences between the Wahhabi movements in Iraq and other jihad movements in the Arab world with the Alawites; which are viewed as ‘heretics’ by those movements. The book also covers the

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<sup>34</sup> Husain, Ed. "Iran Versus Saudi Arabia: Cold War in the Middle East." Council on Foreign Relations, 20 Apr. 2012. Web. 24 Oct. 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Dow, Nicole. "Iran's Soft Power Messaging?" *Global Public Square*. CNN, 31 Aug. 2012. Web. 24 Oct. 2013.

views of Shiites on the Alawites and Syria. The book will be useful, as it would cover the reasons behind the engagement of Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Syrian Civil War.<sup>36</sup>

vi. Other Literature:

Simon Mabon in his book ‘Saudi Arabia and Iran- Soft Power Rivalry in the Middle East’ uses a constructivist-realist approach (Realism of Hinnebusch and the Constructivism of Michael Barnett) to analyze the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Mabon mainly examines the impact of *identity incongruence* upon regional security. Mabon studies the impact of history, culture, religion, ethnicity and security dilemma and on the rivalry. While Mabon’s argument in the book is more diverse than this thesis as it covers the root causes for the rivalry between both states; yet it doesn’t give much attention to the impact of religion. Yet, similarly to this thesis, Mabon covers identity, state formation and its impact on each state’s foreign policy and rivalry.<sup>37</sup>

VI. Objectives

The purpose of this thesis seeks to use religious studies infused with politics to explain the struggle between two states. The study of the use of both states religion to promote their interests is indeed a unique case that can be only witnessed in the Middle East and a study that has been undermined by many political science scholars. Thus, it aims to analyze the role of religious institutions play in in domestic and international politics and how they are used by both the Saudi monarchy and the Iranian clerics.

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<sup>36</sup> Kazimi, Nibras. *Syria through Jihadist Eyes: A Perfect Enemy*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Mabon, Simon. *Saudi Arabia and Iran Soft Power Rivalry in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013.

## *VII. Methods*

The proposed thesis will depend on primary sources in order to collect the needed data. The data will consist of the following: books, journal articles, newspapers and journals, research reports, religious scholarly writing, newspaper opinion-editorials. By focusing on, Iraq and Syria, the thesis intends to use the case study approach, to prove that the religious identity struggle is the main drive of conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

## *Chapter II*

### **Identity, Islam and Pan Islamism in International Relations**

#### *I. Introduction:*

In the Middle East, there has been a common use of identity as a tool by most of the regimes in the region in order to strengthen its legitimacy domestically and internationally. Hence, the Middle East has witnessed numerous conflicts that can be attributed to ideological difference, whether domestic or regional conflicts. For example, the Lebanese Civil War that erupted in 1975 had witnessed many sectarian conflicts between Sunnis, Shi'as and Maronites. In addition, the first Arab Cold War that took place in the late 1950's had been more of an ideological war between Nasser's version of Arab Nationalism and King Saud and Faisal's Pan Islamism; as both regimes struggled for power and influence in the Middle East. Lastly, the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine shows that identity still plays an important role in escalating the conflict between the Israelis and Arabs. Therefore, it is difficult to reach a peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians; as the Israelis are demanding the recognition as a 'Jewish State' while the Arabs and Palestinians are refusing to do so.

Hence, in order to understand why the region is experiencing so many conflicts, especially the current Iranian-Saudi Arabia struggle, there must be a deep understanding of identity and its influence in domestic politics and international relations.

Consequently, this chapter will focus on analyzing the importance of identity in international relations as well as explaining the relevant ideologies of Islam and the origins of Pan-Islam in order to provide the necessary basis that would later explain the

religious identity of the Saudi and Iranian regime while illustrating the historical conflict between the Sunni and Shi'ite Islam and the use of the Iranian and Saudi religion in order to advance their interests in the Middle East.

## *II. Identity and International Relations*

The explanation of identity and social identity is quite complex and ambiguous especially in international relations; therefore it is important to begin with a simple psychological explanation of the term "identity". Using Stephan Desrochers, assistant professor of psychology in Georgia Gwinnet College, explanation; identity is defined as one's answers to the question 'Who am I?' . The answer to this question is linked to the roles people occupy in society, and therefore they are often referred to as "role identities" or simply "identities" . Thus, these role identities are said to influence behavior in that each role has a set of associated meanings and expectations for the self.<sup>38</sup> While Kelly Hannum, Director, Global Research Insights at the Center for Creative Leadership, gives a definition of social identity as "the combination of aspects of our selves-including age, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and socio-economic status- that make us a part of various social groups."<sup>39</sup>

Jan Aart Scholte argues that the construction of an identity is a crucial aspect of social life. Identity has an effect on all human interests, activities, norm and social structure; to the extent that history is filled with incidents where people have killed and been killed in

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<sup>38</sup> Desrochers, S., Andreassi, J., & Thompson, C. (2004). Identity Theory. *Organization Management Journal*, 1(1), 61-69.

<sup>39</sup> Hannum, Kelly. *Social Identity Knowing Yourself, Leading Others*. Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Creative Leadership, 2007. 7.

the assertion of the sense of self.<sup>40</sup> While Chris Farrands argues that identity affects society both as individuals and as members of groups and thus it has an effect on decision makers as he explains “we are in touch with the sources of our identity even if we have no real influence over them or are unconscious of their impact.”<sup>41</sup>

Early international relations scholars such as some traditional realists have undermined the importance of identity in international relations because of their single-minded pursuit of a mechanical model of international relations based on a system of states. In addition, identity in international relations was associated with the study of nationalism. However, this has recently come under heavy criticism, as Benedict Anderson argues in his influential text ‘Imagined Communities’ that national identity is a wholly artificial or social construction; as he further defines the concept of the nation as “I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, nationalism can’t be solely considered the only identity existing in international relations; as religion and other supra-national ideologies precedes nationalism and had been an effective factor in determining the relationship between

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<sup>40</sup> Krause, Jill. *Identities in International Relations*. Hampshire: Macmillan, 1996. 38-79

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.1-21

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, Benedict R. O. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. Pasig City: Anvil, 2003. 49

states. A good example is the change of the identity of the Iranian state from secular to Islamic state led to the deterioration of the relationship between the United States and Iran as Ayatollah Khomeini referred to the United States as the “Great Satan”<sup>43</sup>

### *III. Religion and Identity*

The development of identity throughout history illustrates that identity can't be solely tied to nationalism. According to Daniel Chirot, early humans' only group loyalties were to their families. People identified with their group and it was within each one that critical decisions were made about resource allocation, how to provide for food, and what strategies to use to maintain security. Later, larger family groups, eventually clans, became the main focus of such political identities within which decisions were made to affect survival. At some points the clans formed tribes, which were larger groups that still considered themselves related in some ways. Part of the common set of beliefs or culture that these tribes or ethnic group shared was religious, common gods, rules of behavior, and myths about creation and their place in the universe.<sup>44</sup>

The concept of religion being used as an ideology has been historically found in ancient empires such as those of Egypt, India, Rome and China. Religions were used by states to gain some sort of legitimacy; hence it was a tool to get their subjects to accept that it is right for those with power to possess it. In the Ancient history, rulers were sometimes associated with the god and that they were considered either divine or given mystical

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<sup>43</sup> Black, Ian. "'Great Satan' Warned of a Burning Hell." *'Great Satan' Warned of a Burning Hell*, February 16, 2005. Accessed November 24, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Chirot, Daniel. *Contentious Identities: Ethnic, Religious, and Nationalist Conflicts in Today's World*. New York: Routledge, 2011.1-11



powers. Yet, even with the emergence of monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam; the perception of the population toward their rulers' didn't remain similar to the ancient perception. Religion became an important part of how people saw themselves; it was another important way in which various groups saw themselves and distinguished themselves from non-believers. The Middle Ages and Renaissance era witnessed many wars in the name of religion; such as the nine crusades and the Thirty Years War. <sup>45</sup>

Religion was also used as a political tool to gain legitimacy from the people and it was an identity that could integrate people with different language, ethnicity and cultures and beliefs; whether through the Caliphate or the Papacy. The Caliphate, for instance, was a religious symbol that was established by the first Caliph Abu Bakr El Sidik and its main principle was creating a unified Islamic Umma and thus maintaining the unity of the Muslims through a single leader that was considered the successor of the Prophet (PBUH). The religious symbolism of the Caliphate therefore was important for maintaining order in the Muslim World. According to Marjorie Kelly ,even though the Abbasid's had lost control over their empire during their reign; yet they were still maintained as a symbol of legitimate government and unity among Muslims.<sup>46</sup>

The following section therefore will provide a brief introduction to Islam and pan-Islam which would attempt to illustrate the importance of religion in the Muslim World and the appeal of Islam towards the Muslim population and how it was used through foreign policy to serve the interest of the state.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Kelly, Marjorie. *Islam the Religious and Political Life of a World Community*. New York: Praeger, 1984.

#### IV. *Islam and Pan-Islamism*

##### i. Introduction to the rise of political Islam:

It is estimated that 23.2% of the world's population are followers of Islam; making it the second largest religious group in the world. The religion of Islam originated in the city of Mecca (in the Arabian Peninsula) by the seventh century. Before Islam, the Arabian Peninsula, according to Dr. Mohd Shukri Hanapi, witnessed a dark period that was named *Jahiliyyah* (Ignorance). Hanapi gives a brief description of the *Jahiliyyah* period, in accordance to other historical records, in which the people at that time worshipped idols and believed in animism, lived chaotically and their manners were almost non-existent, for example they were cruel, arrogant and stubborn.<sup>47</sup> Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) was born in 570 AD in Mecca and started his religious role at the age in 610 AD at the age of forty when archangel Gabriel appeared to the prophet and informed him that he was the messenger of Allah. Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) had then started to preach to the people of Mecca and asked them to stop worshipping idols and submit into Islam; hence referring to the submission to Allah. The religion of Islam offers more than the metaphysics of the divine oneness; it also introduces a complete moral system. In addition, there are five main pillars of Islam that are composed of:

- Shahada: recognizing the singular nature of Allah and that Prophet Muhammed as his messenger.
- Salat (Prayers): Performing prayers five times a day.

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<sup>47</sup> Hanapi1, Mohd. "From Jahiliyyah To Islamic Worldview: In A Search Of An Islamic Educational Philosophy." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3, no. 2 (2014): 213-20. Accessed November 24, 2014.

- Fasting from dawn to dusk during Ramadan.
- Payment of zakat (alms) to the poor and needy.
- Pilgrim to the Kaaba.<sup>48</sup>

However, the message of Islam was heavily resisted by the people of Mecca, especially from their nobles that were responsible for the persecution and hostility of the early followers of Islam in Mecca. As a result, Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) had then decided to move to the city of *Yathrib*, now named as Medina, after the Prophet (PBUH) had found acceptance to his message from the people of *Yathrib* and had invited all the Muslims in Mecca to join them in *Yathrib*. This journey of the Muslims and the Prophet (PBUH) was known as the *Hijra* (migration) was later marked as the start of the Islamic year.<sup>49</sup>

The Prophet (PBUH) had been engaged in a series of tribal wars with the people of Mecca and their allies. During his time in *Yathrib*, the prophet had focused on preaching the message of Islam in other areas of the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Abyssinia and Persia. The Prophet (PBUH) had eventually managed in 8<sup>th</sup> year of *Hijra* to take over Mecca and before his death; the entire Arab Peninsula had converted to Islam.<sup>50</sup>

## ii. The Origins of the Sunni-Shiite Divide

The death of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) had marked the beginning of Muslim politics, which had led to the rise of debate and contestation between multiple

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<sup>48</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007.24-48

<sup>49</sup>Ibid

<sup>50</sup>Ibid

interpretations of the religion. The first debate rose between the Muslims as they were attempting to choose a successor to rule the Muslim community. One camp (later identifying themselves as Shi'a) believed that the successor should be chosen from the House of the Prophet and had hence favored Ali Bin Abi Talib, the cousin of the prophet. The second camp (later identifying themselves as Sunna) preferred choosing a leader according to the consensus of the community's senior figures. In the end, Abu Bakr was chosen to become the first caliph and hence the establishment of the political institution of the caliphate.<sup>51</sup>

Eventually, after the assassination of the third Caliph Uthman Bin Affan, Ali Bin Abu Talib was chosen to become the fourth Caliph of the Islamic Empire. However, Ali's caliphate was not accepted by both Aisha B. Abu Bakr, the prophet's widow and the daughter of Abu Bakr, as she accused Ali of being negligent in bringing Uthman's killers to justice and resulted into the first battles of the first fitna war between Ali and Aisha (known as the Battle of the Camel). After Ali managed to defeat Aisha in the Battle of the Camel, Muwawy'ia bin Abi Sufyan, an Ummayyad and a relative of Uthman ibn Affan, challenged Ali for the caliphate as he was discontent for Ali not bringing the killers of Uthman to justice. This led to the rise of another battle between Muwawy'ia bin Abi Sufyan and Ali bin Abi Talib, known as the Battle of Saffin, which end in both sides agreeing to settle the dispute through arbitration.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> "Sunni and Shi'a." BBC News. August 19, 2009. Accessed November 24, 2014. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia_1.shtml).

The resulting negotiations between both the representative of Ali and Muway'iah had weakened the stance of Ali as a caliph; as Ali's representative was beaten by Muway'iah's representative. In addition, Ali's acceptance of arbitration had created for him new enemies, the Kharijities, whom were later on responsible for his assassination in Kufa.<sup>53</sup> After the death of Ali, Muwayi'ah became the fifth caliph of the Islamic World as the son of Ali, Hassan voluntarily gave up the caliphate for the unity of the Islamic Umma.<sup>54</sup>

However, the division between the Sunni-Shiite deepened after the death of Muway'iah and the succession of his son Yazid as the second Caliph of the Ummayyad Dynasty. The younger son of Ali, Al Husyan, refused to give his allegiance to Yazid ; as like many other Muslims, he considered that Yazid's appointment was illegitimate because none of the previous caliphs were appointed by dynastic succession and all were at least nominally accepted by the majority of the Muslim population.<sup>55</sup> Later, Al Husyan had agreed with the people of Kufa to rebel against Yazid but was later intercepted by Yazid's forces in Karbala while Al Husyan was on his way to Kufa along with his family. Although massively outnumbered, Al Husyan had said to have fought heroically in the Battle of Karbala and was eventually killed with his family by Yazid's forces.

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<sup>53</sup> "Sunni and Shi'a." BBC News. August 19, 2009. Accessed November 24, 2014.  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia_1.shtml).

<sup>54</sup> Al-Smadi, Fatima. "Iran-US Rapprochement Iran's Future Role." *AlJazeera Center for Studies*, 2014. Accessed November 24, 2014.  
<http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2014/4/6/20144610115142734Iran-US Rapprochement Irans Future Role.pdf#page=8>

According to Peter Mandaville, the Battle of Karbala was a decisive moment in the emergence of Shi'ism as a separate sect in Islam.<sup>56</sup>

iii. The Islamic Political Society and Islamic Jurisprudence

It is of critical importance to analyze the development of the state and the functions of different actors in the 'Muslim Political Society' from the Rashidun Caliphate to the Ottoman Caliphate as to understand the role Islam plays in modern society. Accordingly, as it will be demonstrated throughout this sub-topic, Islam is a unique religion in the sense that it is not merely a set of religious ideas and practices; yet throughout its early years Islam has led to the creation of a political community that is endowed with a system of law that was designed to protect the interests of believers as well as to regulate their relationship with other empires.

According to Mandville, 'Muslim Political Society' is described as "interwoven system of political and religious authority composed of the *caliph*, the religious scholars or *ulama* as repositories of religious learning who simultaneously provide a mediating layer between the state and society and the institutions and traditions of religious law and jurisprudence."<sup>57</sup>

The *ulama* were influential actors in the 'Muslim political society' as they played an important role in the formation of the political society. The *ulama* were Islamic religious scholars that were specialized in many branches such as Qur'anic interpretation, theology, collection and verification of the Prophet's Hadith (the saying, norms and deeds

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<sup>56</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007.24-48

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

of the prophet), the development of *fiqh* and the establishment of actual court system that had a legal system based on *Shari'a* law. Hence, *Shari'a* law was mainly developed by different jurists and therefore M. Cherif Bassiouni and Gamal M. Badr refer to Islamic law as a “jurist law” which was unique at the time compared to Roman Law that derive laws through legislations by the senate. (Legislative branch)<sup>58</sup> According to Toni Johnson, *shari'a* is a God-given law to mankind that acts as a guide to all aspects of Muslim life that includes daily routines, familial and religious obligations, and financial dealings.<sup>59</sup>

The science of jurisprudence (*ulm el fiqh*) had begun to develop during the late Ummayyad period and had led to the creation of different schools and sub-schools of law (*madhahib*) in Islam. In Sunni Islam, there are 4 main schools of law: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali while in Shi'a Islam the most popular school of law is the Ja'afari; all of the schools have been named after the scholars that inspired them.<sup>60</sup> *Shari'a* law derives primarily from religious sources; the Qur'an and Hadith. Yet, there are also supplemental sources such as *Ijma* (consensus of leading scholars), *qiyas* (method of analogical deduction in reference to the Qur'an or Sunna), *maslaha* (consideration of the public

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<sup>58</sup> Bassiouni, M., and Gamal Badr. "The Shari'ah: Sources, Interpretation and Rule-making." *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law*, 2002. Accessed November 24, 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, Toni, and Mohammed Sergie. "Islam: Governing Under Sharia." Council on Foreign Relations. July 20, 2014. Accessed November 29, 2014. <http://www.cfr.org/religion/islam-governing-under-sharia/p8034>.

<sup>60</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007.24-48

good), *istihsan* (reasoning based on the best outcome) and *ijtihad* (independent judgment or interpretation regarding legal matters) <sup>61</sup>

a) Brief Explanation of Twelver Shi'ism:

In Shi'a Islam, there are three main branches which are the Imami Shi'a (Twelver), Ismaili Shi'a (Sevener) and Zayidi Shi'a (Fiver). The largest of all the Shi'a branches is the Twelver Shi'ites while the second largest is the Ismaili Shi'ite. The Shi'a differences lie within the disagreement in the line of Imamate. For example, the historical difference between the Twelver and Ismaili Shi'a rose after the death of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq and there was a debate between Shiites about the succession of the next Imam. The Ismaili Shiites chose to follow Imam Muhammad Bin Isma'il while the Twelver Shiites chose Imam Musa al-Kazim as the successor of Imam Ja'far al Sadiq. <sup>62</sup>

The Twelver Shi'a has been divided into two schools of theology and jurisprudence; the Usuli (rationalist school) and Akhbari (traditional school). The Usuli depend on *ijtihad* (reasoning) in the interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna while the Akhbari refuse the idea of *ijtihad* in Islamic jurisprudence and recognize the tradition of the Imam (Akhbar) as the only valid resource for the correct understanding of the Qur'an and the Sunna. The Akhbari School used to be the most popular school until the rise of Usuli scholar Muhammed Baqir Bihbahani in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that managed to successfully lead

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Fisher, W. B. *The Middle East: A Physical, Social, and Regional Geography*. 7th ed. London: Methuen, 1978.122-123



intellectual debates against the Akhbari and had led to the current domination of the Usuli school.<sup>63</sup>

The Twelver Shiites highly regard Imam Ali and refer to one of the prophet's hadith "I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate; so whoever desires knowledge, let him enter the gate"<sup>64</sup> as an affirmation of Imam 'Ali's key role in the history of the interpretation of the Qur'an. Consequently, many of his teachings were preserved in a work titled Nahj al-Balagha ('The Way of Eloquence'). The book has had a foundational role in inspiring Shi'a intellectual and spiritual traditions and gave the Imam a pivotal role in Shi'a Islam.

The martyrdom of Imam Husayn had led to the strengthening of the Shiite loyalty towards the family of the prophet (referred to as Ahl al-Bayt) and led to the creation of another sect within Islam. The Usuli Twelvers, similarly to most of the Shi'as, believe reasoning (*ijtihad*) is an important tool in jurisprudential thought. However, *ijtihad* could only be exercised by highly qualified religious scholars, which are referred to as *mujtahids*. The *mujtahids* would become a major source of authoritative guidance for the people on daily issues.<sup>65</sup>

#### b) Brief Explanation of Sunni Jurisprudence:

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<sup>63</sup> Gleave, R. *Scripturalist Islam the History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī'ī School*. Leiden: Brill, 2007. 1-30.

<sup>64</sup> Kazemi, Reza. *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam 'Alī*. London: I.B. Tauris in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007. 19.

<sup>65</sup> Gleave, R. *Scripturalist Islam the History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī'ī School*. Leiden: Brill, 2007. 1-30.

According to Maryam Ishaq al Khalifa, a scholar from Al Azhar University, the differences that are found between the four Sunni schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafei and Hanbali) originated from different interpretations and approaches of the companions of the prophet and their direct disciples.<sup>66</sup> According to Robert Gleave, the main difference between the different four Sunni Schools is the extent of use of legal reasoning. The schools of Hanafi and Maliki are two schools usually had scholars that favored the use of reason (referred to as the people of reason) While the two schools of Shafei and Hanbali are followed by the scholars (referred to as people of tradition) that reject the use of reason and argued that the Qur'an and Sunna should be taken very seriously while decreasing the importance of the use of jurist opinion. Ibn Hanbal even argued that the difference between the opinions of scholars is damaging to the unity of the Muslim community.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, according to Toni Johnson, and Lauren Vriens, the Hanafi School is the liberal and most focused on reason and analogy while Hanbali school is known to be the most orthodox form of Islam.<sup>68</sup> According to Robert Gleave, the jurists had differences in nearly every area of law. However, most scholars were not quite concerned about the differences, as they saw it was a "mercy from God" (as prophet Muhammed had supposedly made this point himself)<sup>69</sup>

*iv. A brief introduction to the Origins of Pan Islam*

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<sup>66</sup> *Islamic Jurisprudence According to the Four Sunni Schools*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Rippin, Andrew. *The Islamic World*. London: Routledge, 2010.p.171-177

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Johnson, Toni, and Mohammed Sergie. "Islam: Governing Under Sharia." Council on Foreign Relations. July 20, 2014. Accessed November 29, 2014. <http://www.cfr.org/religion/islam-governing-under-sharia/p8034>.

In Islam, it is a religious duty for Muslims to maintain their unity and not to engage in combat against each other. Consequently, there is more than one verse in the Holy Qur'an that stresses on the importance of the unity of Muslims. In *Surat Al Imran* (the family of Imran), God asks Muslims to unite and warns them against division, as He says "And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah(stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided...Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving Clear Signs: For them is a dreadful penalty"(Verses 3:103-3:105)<sup>70</sup> Therefore, Islam is unique in the sense that it creates a political system that protects the interests of Muslims, as professor Majid Khadduri explains "Islam is not merely a set of religious ideas and practices, but also a political community endowed with a system of law designed to protect the collective interests of believers as well as to regulate their relations with the outside world"<sup>71</sup>

According to Khadduri, in the early days of the Islamic Empire, the Islamic legal theory had divided the world into two: *Dar al Islam* (Pax Islamica) and *Dar al Harb* (territory of war). *Dar al Islam* refers to the Islamic and non-Islamic territory that was under Islamic sovereignty. The inhabitants of *Dar al Islam* were considered to be subjects of the Caliph and fell under his protection both internally and externally from foreign attacks. While

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<sup>70</sup> *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language: A Summarized Version of At [i.e. Al.]-Tabarī, Al-Qurtubī, and Ibn Kathīr with Comments from Sahīh Al-Bukhārī*. 15th Rev. ed. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 1996.

<sup>71</sup>Proctor, J.Harris. *Islam and International Relations*. New York: Praeger, 1965..24

*Dar al Harb* refers to the rest of the world that weren't under Islamic sovereignty and in theory *Dar al Islam* was in a state of war with *Dar al Harb* because the ultimate objective of Islam is to spread throughout the world; therefore, *Dar al Islam* didn't recognize the sovereignty of *Dar al Harb*.<sup>72</sup> However, with the rise of the Ottomans to rule the Islamic Empire; there were fundamental changes in the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim states. Khadduri notes three fundamental changes in which the Ottoman state started to enter peaceful relationships with other nations of different religions, separation of religious doctrine from the conduct of external relations and giving more autonomy to states under the Ottoman Empire to govern themselves and hence changing the nature of the sovereignty from a medieval Islamic universal sovereignty to a territorial sovereignty of states.<sup>73</sup>

The decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and the loss of predominantly Muslim territory to foreign powers (such as the loss of Algeria and Tunisia to France and Egypt to Great Britain) had alarmed many Muslims that were fearful that the European intervention was a new version of the Crusades.<sup>74</sup> This had led to the rise of movements such as the Young Ottomans that started within the Ottoman Empire that called for Islamic Unity and soon spread throughout the Islamic World.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Proctor, J.Harris. *Islam and International Relations*. New York: Praeger, 1965..25-26

<sup>73</sup>Landau, Jacob M. *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press ;, 1990...33-36

<sup>74</sup> Ibid 12

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.3

According to Jacob Landau, the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the rise of scholars that started to form a pan-Islamic ideology and advocated it such as Jamal al Din Al Afghani. Al Afghani was one of the most influential writers and major contributors of the Pan-Islamism ideology. Landau narrates that Al Afghani political ideology had revolved around the mobilization of Muslims against European aggression and tyrannical rulers. Consequently, he had reached a conclusion that the only way to stop the European powers from invading Muslim lands was by creating a united Islamic World.<sup>76</sup> In addition, Al Afghani wanted to settle the differences between the Sunnis and the Shi'as and to establish a Muslim bloc that had Ottoman Empire, Persia and Afghanistan as its members. Al Afghani saw that the Muslim bloc would play an important role in attracting other Muslim states to create a Pan Islamic Union.

Caliph Abdel Hamid II had throughout his reign tried to promote pan-Islamism in the Islamic World. Landau gives examples of policies and actions that Abdel Hamid II took during his reign that can be considered pan-Islamists such as his appointment devout Muslims in the upper levels of the state bureaucracy and the Sultan's court, sending Pan-Islamic missions (*mullahs*) to states such as Afghanistan to create a union, using the press through Turkish Vakit and Arabic al Jawa'ib newspapers and leaders of the pilgrimage to promote pan-Islamism in the Islamic World and reportedly setting up Pan-Islamic centres in Tunisia, Shanghai and Java. Even after Abdel Hamid deposition, the Young Turks, during World War I, in cooperation with the Germans had published pan-Islamist documents in Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Tatar, Urdu and Chinese. Direct attention was given to Arabic leaders in order to destabilize the Entente powers that occupied Egypt,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.15

Tunisia and Algeria at the time; however the British and the French understood the strength of pan-Islamism and invested considerable amount of money in order to counter its arguments.

However, Pan Islamism for a short period of time had faded with the Ottoman defeat in World War I and the rise of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk that led to the abolishment of the Caliphate. Atatürk imposed a secular Western-style civil law in Turkey and had replaced Turkish nationalism with Ottomanism. In addition, Turkey had adopted an active isolationist foreign policy, according to Hasan Kösebalaban, which distanced itself from other Arab and Western States.<sup>77</sup>

According to Landau, pan Islamist movements, at various times; seem to concentrate on three core ideas:

- a. “The need for a strong central authority to lead Pan Islam and to impose its ideology
- b. The rallying of the entire Muslim World to the cause
- c. Total solidarity with the cause, even at the risk of sacrificing personal or local interest”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Kosebalaban, Hasan. *Turkish Foreign Policy: Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.25-40

<sup>78</sup> Landau, Jacob M. *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press ;9-73

## V. Conclusion:

This chapter demonstrates the importance of identity in domestic and international politics through mostly providing a historical narrative of the formation of the Islamic identity in the Middle East. Hence, it is first of vital importance to understand Islam and its strong influence on its followers and the development of the Muslim political society from the times of Prophet Muhammed until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religious identity was still the most probable dominant identity for the masses. In Egypt, for instance, an Egyptian sociologist gives an analysis of the political behavior of Egyptian villagers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which he notes “for the villagers, the world is classified into believers and non-believers on the basis of the Moslem faith...they are hardly aware of concepts like race or class”.<sup>79</sup> Islam therefore has a strong appeal on Muslims and it has resulted in the creation of political movements that had aimed to the creation of Islamic states and unions. Consequently, the next chapter will focus in depth on the explanation of the role of Shi’ite ideology and the Iranian clerics in the formation of the Iranian state. In addition, the role of Wahhabism and the Saudi *ulama* in the formation of the Saudi state and the political roles they both play in the state.

Yet, before entering into the next chapter, it must be clear to the reader that it is wrong to assume that only Islamic states such as Iran and Saudi Arabia only use Islam in foreign policy. Even secular regimes in the Middle East sometimes use religious

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<sup>79</sup> Safran, Nadav. *Egypt in Search of Political Community: An Analysis of the Intellectual and Political Evolution of Egypt, 1804-1952*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.105

institutions to pursue their interests in other foreign nations. According to P.J Vatikiotis, Gamal Abdel Nasser's secular pan Arab Egypt had resorted sometimes to the use of Islam and Islamic institutions to maintain its interest in the region. Consequently, the media during the Yemeni-Civil War 1962, made a distinction between true Islam and the reactionary regimes of Saudi Arabia, Imam Ahmad, Badr of Yemen, and Jordan that represented the deviationist Islam of "corruption, reaction, exploitation and tyranny" In addition, Al Azhar had a role in promoting Arab nationalism and socialism through the use of Islam. Vatikiotis mentioned that Al Azhar had a primary role in exporting the Egyptian revolution and its aims to other countries in the Arab and Muslim world and claimed that the Egyptian revolution was merely a continuation of Prophet Muhammed's message.<sup>80</sup>

In conclusion, other than Nasser's Egypt, there are many examples of Middle Eastern states that use Islam in foreign policy. However, in the Middle East, possibly two states in particular extensively rely on Islam today to pursue their interests, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran.

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<sup>80</sup> Proctor, J.Harris. *Islam and International Relations*. New York: Praeger .120-152



### *Chapter III*

## **Religion and State Formation**

### *I. Introduction*

This chapter aims to show the impact of religion and religious institutions in the formation of both the Saudi and Iranian states. This will be done through explaining the role of Islamist reformist movements in the Middle East, the history of the Wahhabi movement and its role in the Saudi state and the role of Shiism and religious institutions in Iranian politics.

### *II. The rise of Islamist movements in the Middle East:*

During the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman provinces had witnessed the rise of new actors, such as nationalist movements and Islamic reformist movements, that had an effect on Ottoman legitimacy in the region; both positively and negatively. For instance, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of several nationalist movements in the Balkans that called for their independence from Ottoman rule. According to Donald Quataert, he argues that separate churches emerged in the Balkans during Ottoman rule, such as the Serbian and Bulgarian Churches, which created separate ethnic identities to distinguish themselves from Greek or Ottoman rule.<sup>81</sup> Another example is the rise of the Wahhabi movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Najd. The Wahhabi movement, that would later be led by the House of Saud, had rose against the Ottomans in the Arabian peninsula; gaining control over most of central Arabia by 1805, including Hijaz region (the region that has

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<sup>81</sup>Quataert, Donald. *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 166-177.

both the cities of Mecca and Medina) that was an Ottoman province at the time. However, the Ottomans responded by requesting Muhammed Ali, the *Wali* of Egypt at the time, to send his army to crush the Wahhabi movement and he had managed to do so successfully in 1816.<sup>82</sup> Yet, there were also other movements that supported and advocated Ottoman legitimacy in the Middle East such as *Hizb Al Islah* (the Party of Reform) that was set up by Ali Yusuf, an Egyptian journalist and politician, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to support the Sultan's Pan-Islamic policy.<sup>83</sup>

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire led to the formation of new nation states in the Middle East that were during the early period of their emergence under European colonial rule (with the exception of Saudi-Arabia, Turkey and Iran) According to Mandaville, most Muslims at the time had a primary goal in which they sought to gain independence from European colonial rule, and nationalism proved to be a far more attractive suggestion. A further explanation could be given by taking Egypt as an example; where after World War I and during the Egyptian revolution of 1919 the urban lower classes, that the author described as a religious class that had later in the 1920's and 1930's developed into becoming members or supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology, could only channel their protests through the nationalist movements.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Commins, David Dean. *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009.7-40

<sup>83</sup> Landau, Jacob M. *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press ;,125

<sup>84</sup> The Liberal Nationalist Triumph p.105

However, Islamism had started to develop throughout the mid-twentieth century and has sometimes rivaled other secular ideologies such as nationalism and communism in the Middle East. Islamism, as defined by Mandaville, “refers to a form of political theory and practice that have as their goal the establishment of an Islamic political order in the sense of a state whose governmental principles, institutions and legal system derive directly from the shari’a”<sup>85</sup> The rise of Islamist movements in the Middle East could be further explained by analyzing the foundation and development of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt during the 1930’s and 1940’s. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 by Hassan Al Banna and is considered as one of the oldest Islamists movement in Egypt and the Middle East. Al Banna was born to a religious family and throughout his early years, he has been exposed to different events that had affected his political and religious thoughts such as his experience with anti-colonial movement, being in the Sufi order and the realization of the declining religiosity associated with modernization in Egypt.<sup>86</sup> Hence, one of the arguments that Zia Munson discusses in his paper “Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood” is that modernization and westernization in Egypt had led to problems that some believed could be solved by turning to Islamic ideals. Munson also gives three other reasons that explain the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930’s and 1940’s using the political opportunity structure in which the status maintained by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the decline of the Wafd party and the ideological conflict over the creation of Israel; had all played a role in increasing

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<sup>85</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007 57

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

the popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, like the Muslim Brotherhood, other Islamists movements and parties started to rise in the Middle East and each movement had developed in its own way its ideology and objective.

However, it can be also argued as well that the increase in the number of Islamist movements in the Middle East can be also attributed to the nature of the state of both Saudi-Arabia and Iran. As it will be demonstrated throughout this paper, both states are Islamic in nature and they have been trying to spread their own ideology throughout the Middle East to pursue their own interests. Both states have educated, trained and funded different kind of Islamist movements throughout the region. Consequently, it is necessary to understand the role of religion in both the Saudi state and the Iranian state. In addition, the role of religious scholars in decision making, before discussing the foreign policy of each state; in order to show the strong Islamic identity that is found within both states.

### *III. Islam and the Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia:*

#### **i. Religion and the Saudi State: Muhammad Ibn Abdel Wahhab and the rise of Wahhabism**

The ideology of Wahhabism had a very strong significance in the formation of the Saudi state .It still continues to provide the Saudi state with the needed legitimacy to rule domestically and is considered arguably the most important foreign policy tool that has placed Saudi Arabia as a regional power. Furthermore, the Saudi are keen to keep their in image as the protector of Islam. Consequently, studying and analyzing the history of

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<sup>87</sup> Munson, Ziad. "Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood." Lehigh University. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.lehigh.edu/~zim2/p487.pdf>. 494

Wahhabism is key to understanding the modern Saudi state, the Saudi identity and the politics of the country.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Najd region in modern day Saudi Arabia was an independent region that was free from Ottoman rule because it mainly had no commercial or religious importance. Hence, contrary to other Islamist reformists in other Middle Eastern provinces; the Islamist reformists in Najd did not arise in response to foreign rule or colonialism. Rather, it was because of internal reasons in which they saw was the deterioration of Islam. According to Natana J. DeLong-Bas, the Islamist reformists were dissatisfied with the practices of some Muslims that included some superstitions or rituals which were borrowed from other religions. Consequently, the reformists questioned the faith of such people committing such activities; as in their belief that such activities undermine the concept of *tawhid* (Oneness of God) <sup>88</sup> Hence, the Islamic reformists called for the adherence to *tawhid* and placing God at the center of political order. In addition, the reformists called for the sociomoral reconstruction of society through the reformation of the *shari'a* law; in which they believed they should exclude the studies of the past Muslim scholars of hadith, *taqlid* and start their own scholarly writings and interpretations in order to find the true meaning of the scriptures. <sup>89</sup>

According to DeLong-Bas, Muhammed Abdel Wahhab, one of the most prominent Islamic reformist scholars and the founder of the Wahhabi ideology, was born in Najd in 1702-1703. Abdel Wahhab was a descendent of a family that had many Hanbali jurists

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<sup>88</sup> Commins, David Dean. *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009. 7-40

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

and theologians and had throughout his life been a pious Muslim. Abdel Wahhab notion of *tawhid*, which was derived primarily from the Qur'an and Hadith, became the core principle in Wahhabi ideology. He believed that it served as a cure that would lead to the re-establishment of a just, powerful and stable society.<sup>90</sup> Abdel Wahhab begun his preaching in his hometown, yet when his preaching became a threat to the political leaders in his hometown; he was forced to leave al-Uyaynah and headed to Mecca for a pilgrim. Later, he travelled to Medina in order to proceed with his studies. Abdel Wahhab was influenced by two Muslim scholars in particular, Abdallah ibn Ibrahim ibn Sayf and Muhammed Hayat El Sindi, and he was especially guided in expanding his knowledge in knowing the importance of hadith as a source of scripture, paying attention to the content and chains of transmission, opposition to the *taqlid*, support for *ijtihad*, and the urgent need for sociomoral reform. Shortly after, Abdel Wahhab moved to Basra to continue his studies under al Muhammed al- Mujmu'i. Abdel Wahhab was opposed to Shiism but he specifically targeted one extremist sect the Rafidah. In addition, he denounced some of the practices that violated the notion of *tawhid*.<sup>91</sup> Again, Abdel Wahhab was forced to leave Basra after their political leaders had felt threatened by his growing influence in the region.

However, Abdel Wahhab's influence was growing further after his return to Arabia. His most influential book "*Kitab El Tawhid*" had in a limited time spread throughout the Najd region. After a short while, he managed to ally himself with Uthman Bin Hamid Bin Muammar, the leader of Abdel Wahhab's hometown al- Uyaynah . Abdel Wahhab agreed

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid

<sup>91</sup> Ibid

to help Bin Muammar in his vision of expanding his control over the entire Najd region while Bin Muammar agreed to support for Abdel Wahhab's religious teaching.

The alliance of Abdel Wahhab and ibn Muammar were of vital importance to the growth of the ideology of Wahhabism. There are mainly two reasons why the alliance helped the growth of Wahhabism in Arabia. First, the alliance created the opportunity for him to establish a long lasting relation with Al Saud which eventually led to the creation of another alliance between Abdel Wahhab and Al Saud and that led to the creation of the modern Saudi state. Second, it created a religious basis for the political movement, and hence, his religious vision entered into the realm of political practice.

However, Abdel Wahhab had entered into a power struggle with the ulama; who were deeply threatened by Abdel Wahhab and was accused of heretical and innovative teaching. It resulted in the break-down of the Wahhab-Muammar alliance as Muammar was threatened by powerful tribe leaders of al-Ahsa and Bani Khaled to either kill or expel Abdel Wahhab. Muammar had asked Abdel Wahhab to leave and was escorted into al-Dir'iyah. However, during his stay in al-Dir'yah, Abdel Wahhab had managed to influence Muhammed Ibn Saud's wife to accept his message and soon the entire Al Saud family would follow.

Later in 1744, another alliance was formed between Abdel Wahhab and Muhammed Ibn Al- Saud. It was agreed that Abdel Wahhab would be responsible for the religious matters while Ibn Saud would be responsible for the military and political issues. The Saudis managed to expand their territory in Arabia despite Ibn Abdel Wahhab opposition of using jihad to spread the ideology of Wahhabism. In 1771, Ibn Abdel Wahhab had

resigned from his post as imam.<sup>92</sup> However, this didn't prevent the Saud family from continuing their expansion across Arabia and it took them nearly more than a century to become an independent state.

## ii. Religion and the Saudi State: Wahhabism in modern Saudi Arabia

After a long struggle with the Ottoman Empire and later the Hashemites in the Hegaz region; King Abdel Al Aziz Al Saud managed to establish the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932.<sup>93</sup> As a newly established state, Saudi Arabia needed to undergo modernization. Even though other Middle Eastern states at the time had undergone modernization through secular means and while many Middle Eastern countries today still witness a secular-Islamist divide; Saudi Arabia presents a different model partly because of the Wahhabi ideology that was crucial for Al Saud family to keep as an ideological cover for their legitimacy to rule. Therefore, this part shall attempt to explain the influence of Wahhabism on the Saudi state and the power of the Wahhabi *ulama* in the modern Saudi Arabian state.

According to Frank E. Vogel, the constitution of Saudi Arabia is the *shari'a* law. The *shari'a* law is the sole formal source of political legitimacy and the common law of the land and thus *shari'a* is implicated in all politics. Religious scholars are therefore highly respected by the Saudis and still earn their sole trust in interpretations of law (*fiqh*) and like Wahabbis hold the belief that true Islam was practiced by the early followers of

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> "Saudi Arabia Profile." BBC News. October 8, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14702705>.



Islam (*salaf*) and any other later additions are completely disregarded and accused of infidelity.<sup>94</sup>

The Saudi political system can be summarized through the explanation of the *siyasa shar'iyya* (*shari'a* governance). According to the *siyasa shar'iyya*, there are two authoritative holders that uphold religion and politics. The first authoritative holder is the religious Wahhabi *ulama* and their application of law is through religious legal courts. While the second authoritative body in Saudi Arabia is composed of the King and his government. The *shari'a* delegates the King the necessary power that makes him able to come up with laws that serve public interest so long as it doesn't conflict *shari'a* law. Therefore, as Vogel mentions, the dual conception of law and its implementation is a pre-modern legal system which was used previously by Islamic Empires and hence serves as constitutional checks and balances and allows compromise between ideal and necessity.

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Therefore, *shari'a* has a strong influence in shaping of the political life in Saudi Arabia. Vogel gives three arguments of how *shari'a* lends extensive structure to political issues. The first argument is that *shari'a* provides a structure according to which any issue occupies a particular space or field within religious discourse. Therefore, *shari'a* creates different expectations when addressing a certain issues such as the relevance of history and custom, form of reasoning used and the authority of which an issue lies. Thus, for instance, the King is free to regulate any issue that is not mentioned in the Qur'an or Sunna under his authority as long as it doesn't conflict with the norms and principles of

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<sup>94</sup> Hefner, Robert W. *Shari'a Politics Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. 55-56

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

*shari'a*. The second argument is related more to the method used in interpretation of an issue. Often, the legal reasoning that is used by of Saudi scholars is controversial to some segments of society; such as insisting that women must veil their faces or banning women from driving.<sup>96</sup> Recently, Saudi activists have launched a campaign to encourage women to defy the drive ban on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October. The activists claim that there is no single text in Islam that prohibits women from driving.<sup>97</sup> However, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdel Aziz Al Sheikh, has stated in November 2013 that the ban on women driving protects the society of evil.<sup>98</sup> The third argument is that *shari'a* decides on the authority to which it assigns jurisdiction over an issue. Hence, private law is under the jurisdiction of religious *ulama*, while political issues are under the jurisdiction of the King. Yet, there are hybrid institutions such as and the Agency of Ordering Good and Forbidding the Evil in which scholars that are appointed by the King have full control over it and apply *fiqh* norms while having a partly dispense governing authority. Lastly, and more importantly, the *shari'a* ideas shape the Saudi notion of citizenship; therefore the adherence to the Islamic Umma and casting doubt over any other nationality and hence in order to become a true Saudi citizen one must be a true Sunni.<sup>99</sup>

For more than two centuries, (ever since the alliance of Al Saud and Ibn Abdel Wahhab) Saudi Arabia has managed to keep the *siyasa shariyya* doctrine as its political system and

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Timberlake, Ian. "Saudi Activists Rev up Women's Right-to-drive Campaign." Business Insider. October 9, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-saudi-activists-rev-up-womens-right-to-drive-campaign-2014-10>.

<sup>98</sup> "Saudi Grand Mufti: Ban on Women Driving Protects against 'evil'." Al Arabiya News. November 29, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/11/29/Saudi-Grand-Mufti-ban-on-women-driving-protects-against-evil.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Hefner, Robert W. *Shari'a Politics Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. 55-56

thus giving the religious *ulama* a large role in dictating the policies of the state as they are solely in control of the basic and common laws. In addition, the religious *ulama* play a vital role in providing the Saudi monarchy with an ideological cover and protects them from internal and external ideologies that might be a threat to their legitimacy. Yet, even though religious *ulama* are mostly appointed by the King or work in governmental institution; the *ulama* still maintain their independence and are not controlled by the king and his government. Therefore, the religious *ulamas*' opposition to western secularization had sometimes led to opposition of the policies of the king. The next part will provide examples of how the religious *ulama* managed to remove the political challenge imposed by tribalism while maintaining its cultural and social importance for the Saudi monarchy and examples that show the *ulama*'s resistance to westernization in Saudi Arabia which reflect its influence through Saudi society.

The Saudi monarchy considers both religion and tribalism as important pillars in boosting its power and maintaining stability in the Saudi Arabia. According to Muhammad Al Atawneh , the *ulama* were tasked to bridge the differences between Islam and tribalism. The Wahhabi *ulama* were therefore tasked with removing the political phenomenon of tribalism through eradicating the principle tribal values of *asabiya*, group solidarity based on blood kinship and tribal custom which serves as a separate legal system. It is strongly evident that the Wahhabi ideology is clearly intolerant to other Islamic and non-Islamic ideologies such as Sufism, Shiism, tribalism and nationalism. Al Atawneh gives a reference to one of the legal scholarly opinions by Sheikh Salih Al Munjid in which he

condemns *asabyia* as a pre-Islamic practice and that it threatens the unity of the Islamic Umma. Hence, according to Munjid:<sup>100</sup>

*“Tribalism that is appearing nowadays in most countries, where people form factions on the basis of race, color, or homeland, is akin to the ancient tribalism that existed between the tribes of Aws and Khazraj; it is one of the leftovers of jahiliyya.”*<sup>101</sup>

In addition, the former mufti of Saudi-Arabia, Abd al Aziz Ibn Baz had illustrated that loyalty should only be to Islamic *shari'a* and their authority holders (the king and *ulama*) Furthermore, if both the *ulama* or the king were to deviate away from the universal principles of the *shari'a*; one must not oppose them but guide them. According to Ibn Baz:

*“The authority holders are the umara' of the Muslims, who must be obeyed on condition that their decrees match the will of God, and do not contradict it. Thus the 'ulama' and umara' must be obeyed in doing good, for only in this way will peace and safety reign and will the usurper be saved from the usurper, while disobedience will cause anarchy so that the strong will usurp the weak. If, however, the decree is issued counter to the will of God, neither 'ulama' the nor the rulers should be obeyed. An example would be a decree to drink wine or to deal with usury. However, no opposition must be raised against the rulers, even when not fulfilling the shari'a, but rather they must be advised through ways of tranquility.”*<sup>102</sup>

As a result, tribal customs such as *janbiyya*, a punishment in which the accused is struck in the head by a sharp instrument, has been prohibited since it contradicts the Islamic *shari'a*. As a result, the Saudi *ulama* have called upon tribal leaders to avoid political tribalism and instead resort to *shari'a* law. Yet, the *ulama* have endorsed the tribal

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<sup>100</sup> Atawneh, Muhammad K. *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity Dar Al-Ifta in the Modern Saudi State*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.17-34

<sup>101</sup> Hatina, Meir. *Guardians of Faith in Modern times 'ulama' in the Middle East*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. 195-211..218

<sup>102</sup> Hatina, Meir. *Guardians of Faith in Modern times 'ulama' in the Middle East*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. 195-211.

shiekhs' solving disputes as long as it is in accordance with *shari'a*. The *ulama* succeeded in removing the challenge imposed by tribalism on the Saudi monarchy while maintaining the social and cultural aspects of tribalism which was fundamental to keep for legitimacy and other purpose such as the recruitment of members of the armed forces and police.<sup>103</sup> In addition, Chapter 4 will briefly show how the Wahhabi scholars managed to use the same methods to increase Saudi Arabian influence in the Muslim World.

In order to analyze the extent of the authoritative power of the Saudi Wahhabi *ulama* in modern day Saudi Arabia; it is important to look at the status of the *ulama* in the Saudi Arabian *Dar Al Ifta* institution. The first *Ifta* institution of Saudi Arabia was established by King Al Saud in 1953 and it was named as *Dār al-Iftā' walIshrāf 'alā al-Shu'ūn al-Dīniyya* (Institute for the Issuance of Religion Legal Opinions and the Supervision of Religious Affairs) The creation of the first *Ifta* institution was a result of the need for modernization and therefore was a part of the bureaucratic and administrative reforms that was taken in Saudi Arabia in the 1950's. In modern Saudi Arabia there are three important institutions within the broader *Dar Al Ifta* : the Grand Mufti, the Board of Senior Ulama (BSU) and the Permanent Committee for Scientific Research and Legal Opinion (CRLO).

The Grand Mufti office was established by King Abdel Aziz in 1952 and the first Mufti to be appointed was Shiekh Muḥammad Ibn Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh . However, after the death of al-Shaykh in 1969; the position of the Mufti was discontinued until 1993 when King Fahd re-established it and appointed Sheikh Abdel-'Azīz Ibn Bāz as the Grand

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid

Mufti of Saudi Arabia. The Mufti mainly has the authority to issue fatwas and is usually the chairman of both the BSU and CRLO. The current Mufti of Saudi Arabia is Abdel Aziz Ibn Abdullah Al Shaykh.<sup>104</sup>

The BSU was established in 1971 by royal decree from King Faisal. The number of members and length of membership of the BSU is not fixed and is usually decided by the King.<sup>105</sup> Currently, according to the royal decree 71/A issued by King Abdullah in 2013, the BSU is composed of 21 members headed by Sheikh Abdel Aziz Ibn Abdullah Al Shaykh and that the membership of the *ulama* in the BSU lasts for four years.<sup>106</sup>

According to the 1971 royal decree, the role of the BSU is “to issue legal opinions, based on the Sharī‘a, on matters submitted by the King (*walī al-amr*), and to act as an advisory body in Common Law issues, to facilitate the King’s decisions.”<sup>107</sup> While it seems that the decisions of the BSU are only advisory; yet its decisions in many cases were converted to state laws with the King’s approval. Al Atawneh provides several examples, one of which is the issue of deposition divorce (*khul’*).<sup>108</sup> In addition, the CRLO acts as a branch of the BSU and its main function is to prepare research for BSU discussions and the issuance of *fatwas* in the matters of faith, worship or transactions.

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<sup>104</sup> Atawneh, Muhammad K. *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity Dar Al-Ifta in the Modern Saudi State*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. 17-34

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> "أوامر ملكية: إعادة تكوين هيئة كبار العلماء.. وتعيين الشيخ الغيهب رئيساً للمحكمة العليا." *جريدة الرياض* " January 16, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.alriyadh.com/801984>.

<sup>107</sup> Atawneh, Muhammad K. *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity Dar Al-Ifta in the Modern Saudi State*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. 17-34

<sup>108</sup> Ibid

The Wahhabi *ulama* have an important political and social role in which they are able to maintain the *siyasa sharyyia* method of rule. The Wahhabi *ulama*'s role in politics is usually indirect yet of great importance. Al Atawneh uses three examples in Saudi history that illustrate the political importance of the *ulama*. The first example was the issuance of a fatwa by the BSU in 1979 after a religious fundamentalist group had taken over the Kaaba. The fatwa denounced the religious fundamentalist group stating that their acts were against the *shari'a* as the fundamentalists have violated the sacredness of the Kaaba, created bloodshed in the *Haram* (Kaaba) and in the month of *Muharra* (the *shari'a* forbids Muslims to fight in the sacred month of Muharram and in the Kaaba) gave permission to the authorities for the use of weapons on sacred premises (which is strictly forbidden in Mecca and Medina) and opposing the leader of Muslims (Saudi King) despite of their allegiance. Therefore, the *fatwa* bolstered the legitimacy of the King and gave permission to the authorities to use weapons in the sacred *Haram* to combat the fundamentalist. The second example was the *fatwa* issued by the BSU that gave permission to the Saudi monarchy to allow the stationing the US troops in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War in 1991. The fatwa was so controversial that it led to the objection of many scholars and the rise of new Islamist groups in Saudi Arabia such as the Sahwi and the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR). The scholars demanded from the chairman of and the King several reforms to be taken in the Kingdom. While there were several reforms that were taken after the rise of a new opposition such as re-establishing the office of the Grand Mufti and the establishment of the Consultative Council; the opposition members were arrested. The BSU had issued a communique

denouncing the CDLR which would later result into a crackdown on the movement.<sup>109</sup>

The communique stated that:

*“ The Board [BSU] finds the behavior of those who signed the document [of CDLR] strange. The Board unanimously denounces this organization [CDLR] as illegitimate, because Saudi Arabia is a country that rules according to Islam. Islamic courts are spread across the country and no one has been prevented from complaining about any injustice to the specified agencies or to the ombudsmen. ”*<sup>110</sup>

As previously mentioned, the Saudi Wahhabi *ulama* had manage to a large extent resist secular modernization in Saudi-Arabia and have sometimes challenged the King in some of the reforms that were undertaken. An example could be seen, as according to David Commins, in the creation of Islamic religious universities in order to counter balance the secular universities in Riyadh and the Arab World. Another was the structural change of the commercial courts in the late 1960’s. The commercial courts were secular courts that were under the Ministry of Commerce. However, in 1968 the *ulama* had managed to win a concession in gaining equal representation in these courts and by 1969 they dominated the commercial commissions enforcing statutory regulations.<sup>111</sup> The Wahhabi *ulama* have also resisted the King’s attempt to codification of the *fiqh*, initiatives to reform the judiciary and the widening of the *masaa* (in the Holy Kaaba) are in Mecca.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Atawneh, Muhammad K. *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity Dar Al-Ifta in the Modern Saudi State*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. 17-34

<sup>110</sup> Ibid

<sup>111</sup> Commins, David Dean. *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009. Print.104-129

<sup>112</sup> Hefner, Robert W. *Shari’a Politics Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.55-92



### iii. Conclusion

The role of religion in maintaining order and stability in Saudi Arabia is of crucial importance. It is a major components of Saudi identity , as previously mentioned before, that being Saudi is strongly related to the Wahhabi definition of being a true Sunni Muslim ; which is following the Salafi tradition(early followers of Islam).As Sheikh Al Munjid says:

*“To say that the Salafi (Wahhabi) movement resembles any other Islamic movements is wrong. The Salafi movement is the only one that must be followed by adopting its approach, joining it, and performing jihad with it. Therefore, Muslims are not permitted to follow any other movement, since they all are straying movements.”<sup>113</sup>*

It can be argued that Al Munjid’s explanation of the sole adherence to the Wahhabi ideology partially explains Saudis’ resistance to foreign ideologies internally and externally; as Wahhabism strongly rejects other Islamic movements or sects such as Sufism and Shiism or secular ideologies such as Pan-Arab nationalism. Hence, the threat of one ideology had led the Saudi regime to place a strong emphasis on spreading the Wahhabi ideology abroad (as will be explained later in Chapter 5).

In addition, the use of religion has maintained the ‘siyasa shariyya’ model and has kept the Al Saud-Ibn Wahhab agreement for more than two centuries. While it is debated by some scholars such as Ayman al-Yassini, author of the book Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arab, that the *ulama* have recently declined in power because of the increasingly bureaucratization and westernization of the Saudi government; it can be argued that it is very to measure the degree of power of the *ulama* due to the that have incorporated in government and therefore it’s possible that they have become influential

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<sup>113</sup> Hatina, Meir. *Guardians of Faith in Modern times ‘ulama’ in the Middle East*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. 218

within the government and the fact that the distribution of power through *siyasa shariyya* was never clear. However, the *ulama* still play a role in shaping Saudi society and culture through their issuance of fatwas and their close interaction with society. The *ulama* have maintained the pre-modern Islamic role of mediating between the King and his people. Therefore, the relationship between the King and the *ulama* is mutually beneficial in which the *ulama* play a pivotal role in providing legitimacy to the King while the King's role is to preserve the Wahhabi ideals through the consultation of *ulama*.<sup>114</sup>

#### IV. *Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran*

##### i. **Religion and the state: History of Iran and the Iranian Revolution of 1979**

While the rise of Islam was under prophet Muhammed (pbuh) in modern day Saudi Arabia; the religion of Islam had spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa. By the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Caliph Umar Ibn Khattab managed to defeat and end the Sassanid rule over Persia. For centuries after the conquest of Persia, the majority of Muslims in Iran were Sunni for several ruling dynasties. However, with the Mongol invasion of Iran; most of the Muslim Sunni political power were destroyed and thus led to the rising of Shiite political forces.<sup>115</sup> According to Roger Savoury, the rise of the Safavids dynasty in Iran had led to the conversion of most of the Muslims to Shiism. In 1501, Shah Ismail I had

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<sup>114</sup> Atawneh, Muhammad K. *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity Dar Al-Ifta in the Modern Saudi State*. Leiden: Brill, 2010..50

<sup>115</sup> Nasr, Hossein. "Religion in Safavid Persia." *Iranian Studies* 7, no. 1/2 (1974): 271-86. Accessed November 27, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org.library.ucegypt.edu:2048/stable/4310164?seq=2>.

declared Twelver Shiism as the state religion. At that time, two third of the population in Tabriz was composed of Sunni Muslims. The Shah gave a speech in Tabriz in the name of the Twelve Imams and the call of prayers had added the words of ‘I bear witness that Ali is beloved of God.’<sup>116</sup> The Shah at the time was afraid from the reaction of the Sunnis and therefore he had threatened those that would oppose him, as he said “if the people utter one word of protest, I will draw the sword and leave not one of them alive”. The city of Tabriz had put no resistance to the Shah and had accepted the conversion to Shiism. However, most of the Sunni *ulama*’s had feared Ismail’s death threat and therefore fled the region while those that refused were killed. According to Savoury, the Shah’s move to declare Twelver Shiism as the official religion of the Safavid state was made for mainly two political gains. Firstly, the Shah was worried of his political rivals the Ottomans and therefore wanted to have a different political identity that would separate it from the powerful Sunni states. Secondly, the Shah claimed that he was a representative of the Mahdi and therefore giving himself some sort of a divine right.<sup>117</sup>

However, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century under the Qajar dynasty and later the Pahlavi dynasty; Iran underwent several secular modernization reforms. In addition, Iran was occupied and divided between the British and the Russians during the First and Second World War. Yet, it was during the reign of Muhammed Reza Shah, the ruler of Iran from 1941-1979, that Iran had followed a pro-Western and an anti-communist policy. The Shah had faced opposition during the implementation of the ‘White revolution’ in the

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<sup>116</sup> Menashri, David. *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1990.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid

1960's from the National Front and the religious institutions. However, the Shah used the SAVAK (secret police-established in 1957) to crackdown on any opposition movement. Nonetheless, political tensions were on the rise in Iran in the late 1970's; as according to Elton Daniel, there were two main reasons behind the rising unpopularity of the Shah's regime. The first was the economic crisis that had hit Iran in the late 1970's and the growing opposition towards the SAVAK. Yet, the first spark that ignited the Iranian Revolution was an article published in a semi-official newspaper in January 7<sup>th</sup> 1978 that accused the exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran's Supreme Leader from 1979-1989, of being a British spy. The article led to a series of mass demonstrations in the city of Qom and while the Shah had introduced economic and political reforms in order to maintain stability; it would not last as Iran was in a pre-revolutionary state. Later, a fire broke out in Rex Cinema in the city of Abadan that led to the death of 400 people. Rumors spread throughout Iran that claimed that the SAVAK were responsible for the fire in order to frame the religious institution. This led to a series of demonstrations throughout Iran and resulted in the Shah declaring martial law. On 8<sup>th</sup> September 1978, a massive demonstration was held in Tehran, calling for the removal of the Shah and the return of Ayatollah Khomeini. The demonstration became excessively violent as the army and armed civilians engaged in combat in what became known as Black Friday. A series of demonstrations and protests continued afterwards and eventually led the army to refuse to take part in cracking down on the Iranian demonstrations. Thus, in January 1979 the Shah fled to Egypt with Ayatollah Khomeini returning to Iran in February 1979.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Daniel, Elton L. *The History of Iran*. 2nd ed. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood, 2012.143-174

The 1979 Iranian Revolution led to the establishment of an Islamic state in Iran. In order to understand the current Islamic identity of the people of Iran; the study of Khomeini and his ideology is relatively important. Ayatollah Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini was born in 1902 near Qom to a family of clerics and landowners and is one of the descendants of the Shiite Imam Mousa Al Kasim (7<sup>th</sup> Imam) Khomeini received a traditional religious education where he would later become a student of Grand Ayatollah Aqa-Hosayn Boroujerdi. Khomeini was opposed to secularization and it was clear his first book 'Revealing of Secrets' (*Kashf Al Asrar*) in which he defended traditional Islam and was against the drinking of alcohol, music and the mixing between men and women. However, according to Elton Daniel, it wasn't until the death of the Grand Ayatollah Boroujerdi that Khomeini became more politically active which resulted into his exile to Iraq in 1964. Yet in Iraq, Khomeini managed to create a network of supporters in Iran and they later rose to become political elites of the new Islamic Republic of Iran; the current Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was one of Khomeini's students.<sup>119</sup>

The revolutionary idea of an Islamic state was introduced by Khomeini in the 1970s in Najaf in which he came up with a new theocratic governance rule called *Wilayet al Faiqh* (Guardianship of Jurists) According to Hamid Mavani, , the concept of *Wilayet al Faqih* is to provide the Islamic jurists with authority to run the affairs of the state and interpret Islamic rulings on matters on numerous fields such as the social realm, personal affairs and devotion until the reappearance of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam in which he would safeguard the Islamic state. Khomeini's in the beginning wanted an Islamic state that is ruled by the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid

general principles of the *shari'a* and headed by qualified jurisconsult. However, before his death in 1988, he expanded the authority of jurisconsult in which he gave them authority to bypass *shari'a* law if it conflicts with society's best interests.<sup>120</sup> The political system of Iran will be explained in more details later in this chapter.

Khomeini managed to gain public support for his revolutionary ideas for many reasons including the increasing appeal of Shiite traditionalism to the Iranian people and the charisma of Ayatollah Khomeini. According to Said Amir Arjomand,, the 1960's and 1970's witnessed a period of Islamic resurgence where Shiite traditionalism became a trend in Iran. Arjomand backs his analysis through providing more than one evidence such as the increasing number of religious association in 1970s, the increasing number of religious publishers all over Iran, the increase in number of pilgrims to Mecca and visits to religious shrines and lastly in 1973 the two best-selling books were the Qur'an (700,000 copies) and *Mafatih El Jenan* (Key to Heaven, 450,000 copies) Therefore, with the increasing popularity of Shiite traditionalism; Khomeini found support for his message through political Islamic associations such as '*Hey'at-e Mo'talefeh-ye Eslami*' and instant clerical journalism. In addition, Khomeini's charisma was crucial for the success of the Iranian revolution and the Islamization of the state. The acclamation of Khomeini as Imam by his followers in 1970 (which had not been acclaimed to anyone

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<sup>120</sup> Mavani, Hamid. "Ayatullah Khomeini's Concept of Governance (wilayat Al-faqih) and the Classical Shi'i Doctrine of Imamate." *Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 5 (2011).208-217

since the sixteenth century) had given him the power needed to oust the shah and eliminate competition after the revolution from secularists and religious opposition.<sup>121</sup>

Ayatollah Khomeini had also envisioned exporting the Iranian Islamic revolution far beyond Iran and favored an Islamic rule in Muslim majority states.. According to David Menashri, associate professor of Middle Eastern and African History in Tel Aviv University, Khomeini during his exile in Iran in the 1960's advocated for Islamic Unity and didn't differentiate between Sunnis and Shi'as "Our movement is for an Islamic goal, not for Iran alone.. Iran has [only] been the starting point"<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, Khomeini had elaborated his position about the Sunni-Shiite divide during an interview in Paris "Muslims are one family, even if they are subject to different governments and even if they live in regions remote from one another... This is important and basic point. This is the strategy...Being Shi'i or Sunni is not the question."<sup>123</sup>

## ii. **Religion and the State: The Political Model of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

### a) The Islamic Republic's Political System

As previously mentioned, Ayatollah Khomeini's *Wilayat al Faqih* is a unique and relatively new governance model that is not found in traditional Shiite or Sunni jurisprudence. Therefore, Iran is currently the only Muslim country that is ruled by

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<sup>121</sup> Arjomand, Said Amir. *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.175-283

<sup>122</sup> Ganji, Manouchehr. *Defying the Iranian Revolution: From a Minister to the Shah to a Leader of Resistance*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002.77

<sup>123</sup> Menashri, David. "Iran and Its Troubled Neighbourhood." In *Post-revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society, and Power*. London: Frank Cass, 2001.

jurisconsult. The Supreme Leaders in Iran enjoy an enormous amount of power as they have control over the executive, legislative and judiciary branches. According to Bahman Baktiari, , article 4 of the Iranian Islamic Constitution states that all laws and regulations must be in accordance with *shari'a* law.<sup>124</sup> The Iranian political system is hybrid and complex because it mainly mixes democratic and theocratic values.

The Iranian political system has six important bodies ; the most powerful is that of the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader is an unelected official that serves for life and is appointed by the Assembly of Experts. The Assembly of Experts is an elected body composed of 86 members that are elected every eight years. The role of the Assembly is to appoint and dismiss the Supreme Leader; even though they have not so far used their power in dismissing any of the Supreme Leaders before.<sup>125</sup> The Supreme Leader has the authority to appoint six members of twelve of the Council of Guardians; the six members are clergymen. The other six members of the Council of Guardians are jurists that are nominated by the judiciary and approved by the *Majlis* (parliament) The Council of Guardians are responsible for deciding whether legislation is in compliance with the *shari'a* law and the constitution and the Council have the right to veto a legislation if it conflicts with *shari'a* law or the constitution. However, if the *Majlis* insists that the legislation is necessary and serves the broader interest of the people; another body, the Expediency Discernment Council, reviews if the legislation serves the larger interest of the Islamic system. In addition, members of the Expediency Discernment Council are

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<sup>124</sup> Hefner, Robert W. *Shari'a Politics Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011..31

<sup>125</sup> Iran. Who Holds the Power?" BBC News. Accessed November 30, 2014.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle\\_east/03/iran\\_power/html/guardian\\_council.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/iran_power/html/guardian_council.stm).



selected by the Supreme Leader. In 2005, the Supreme Leader delegated the Expediency Discernment Council supervisory powers over all branches of government.<sup>126</sup> The *Majlis* is Iran's legislative body and it is composed of 290 members that are elected every four years. The Supreme Leader must approve of all candidates before running for elections. The *Majlis* has the authority to draft legislation, summon or impeach a minister or president and approve the national budget. Lastly, the President of Iran is responsible for running the executive body such as managing the economic policies and national and international affairs. The president is elected through popular vote and serves a presidential term of four years and a sitting president can hold only two consecutive terms. However, the Supreme Leader must approve of the candidates before running in elections. The Supreme Leader also appoints the head of the judiciary and is the Supreme Commander of the Iranian Armed Forces.<sup>127</sup>

#### b) The Islamic Republic's Ideological Shift

One of the challenges that faced the Islamic Republic in the beginning was the dichotomy found between the Iranian identity with the Islamic identity. According to Alam Saleh, Iranian national identity was artificially constructed by Iranian historians and elitist during the mid-nineteenth century. Qajar intellectuals were influenced by European nationalism and orientalism and therefore historians and intellects reconstructed Iranian national identity to be based on pre-Islamic Persia and Aryanism. The reconstruction of Iranian ideology was favored by the nationalist government in Iran during the Pahlavi

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<sup>126</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007:179-196

<sup>127</sup> "Iran. Who Holds the Power?" BBC News. Accessed November 30, 2014.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle\\_east/03/iran\\_power/html/guardian\\_council.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/iran_power/html/guardian_council.stm).

rule. Accordingly, secularist elitists adopted an anti-Islamic and anti-Arab approach as they blamed them for the destruction of the ancient Persian Empire and called for the revival of Aryan glory and promoted Persian superiority.<sup>128</sup> This was clearly evident in one of Jamshid Amuzegar's, former Prime Minister of Iran, speeches where he said "We were invaded by Greeks, Arabs, Mongols and Turks, but we did not lose our originality"<sup>129</sup>

However, as Alam Saleh notes, the Iranian national identity structure is based on anti-other sentiments and a shared hatred of neighboring states; which was a bit problematic since other ethnic Iranians were transnational and share a common identity with neighboring state. Nevertheless, Khomeini and Iranian Islamic intellectuals managed to a great extent, with the help of external factors, to merge both ideologies and prevent an identity crisis or division within his supporters. Khomeini managed to eliminate political rivals including the secular nationalists, liberals and Islamists and clergymen that opposed Khomeini by April 1983. In addition, the regime relied on using anti-imperialism as a source of bolstering its own unity. The Iranian government had also used Friday Prayer Imams to increase its own legitimacy and spread its own ideology. Arjomand uses a speech given by former President Khamenei in the 1980's that shows the importance of Friday Imam's to the success of the Islamic revolution as he says that the Imams are "the great pillars of the Revolution, the speaking tongue of the Leader and

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<sup>128</sup> Saleh, Alam. *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.45-58

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.54

the strong arm of general mobilization.”<sup>130</sup> The Iranian government also relied on Islamic propaganda; which according to Arjomand was considerably effective on youth. In 1982, the Ministry of Education had 70,000 existing teachers familiarized with Islamic ideology and were joined by 18,000 newly trained the following year. Furthermore, the Iranian government created political-ideological bureaus that were attached to all governmental institutions to ensure ideological commitment and knowledge of Islam.

<sup>131</sup>Lastly, the Iraqi invasion of Iran had led to the unification of Iranians against Saddam Hussein, former President of Iran, and the Iranian government had used propaganda by stressing the importance of maintaining Iranian territory and used Shi’a ideological terms such as martyrdom to mobilize the people. In 1987, Khomeini stated that Iran was fighting for a divine cause.<sup>132</sup> In addition, earlier in the war the clergymen’s distribution of plastic keys that symbolized keys to paradise, as Tim McGirk, narrates the story of Iranian guide Merhdad in the Iraqi-Iran war:

“It was made in China, of plastic[keys]. The mullahs told us that the key would open the door to a golden palace with hundreds of rooms and a beautiful virgin in each room. You see, we were facing certain death — the Iraqis had poison gas. Like hundreds of

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<sup>130</sup> Arjomand, Said Amir. *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. 175-283

<sup>131</sup> Ibid

<sup>132</sup> "Khomeini in First Speech in 3 months, Pledges War until Victory" The New York Times. February 10, 1987. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/11/world/khomeini-in-first-speech-in-3-months-pledges-war-until-victory.html>.

thousands of young conscripts in the Iran-Iraq war, Mehrdad was destined for a suicidal human-wave charge on the Iraqi lines”<sup>133</sup>

In 2001, a poll by the World Values Surveys questioned Iranians what would best describe them in terms of identity. 61% of Iranians identified themselves as Muslims while only 34.1% identified themselves as Iranians. While there are no previous figures to measure the level of change; yet the figures show the impact that religious propaganda has made on Iranians.<sup>134</sup>

### c) Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran

In the early years of the Iranian Islamic, Ayatollah Khomeini wanted to maintain unity within his supporters and therefore created a single party that dominated politics in called the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) The IRP was a conservative political party that was created to meet the goals of the revolution. Before Khomeini’s death, in 1987, the IRP was dissolved after it had met the goals of the revolution.<sup>135</sup> Currently, there are three major players in Iranian politics: pragmatists, reformists and hardliners.

The pragmatists movement appeared straight after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini.

According to Saeed Barzin, the pragmatist view on good governance is that of a populist government that is administrated by bureaucrats in cooperation with the clergy.

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<sup>133</sup> McGirk/Alamut, Iran. "E-mail From Alamut: In Search of the Assassins' Paradise." Time. July 18, 2005. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1084041,00.html>.

<sup>134</sup> Lee, Robert Deemer. *Religion and Politics in the Middle East Identity, Ideology, Institutions, and Attitudes*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2010.256-259

<sup>135</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007. 175-283

Therefore, the pragmatists see the clergy as senior partners in ruling the state rather than being their superiors. In addition, Pragmatists stress on the importance of using rationalism and debate in politics. In addition, pragmatists view international relation in a realist manner and therefore prefer the use of power politics in analyzing foreign relations. Therefore, they have little interest in viewing international relations as moral or revolutionary.<sup>136</sup> One of the most prominent pragmatist Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a cleric, became the president of Iran from 1989-1997. During his presidency, Rafsanjani introduced certain liberalizing reforms and focused mainly on the developing the economy and reconstructing Iran after the costly Iraqi-Iran war. In addition, Rafsanjani allowed more debates in the Iranian media and ‘*Majlis* ‘and allowed for policies and initiatives to be openly criticized.<sup>137</sup>

The reformist movement appeared in the 1990’s and was developed by former deputy minister of intelligence Saeed Hajjarian; who is considered the theoretician of reform. The reformist believed that change was necessary and could only be achieved through reform. Abbass Abdi, one of the most influential Iranian reformists, gives an explanation how the movement defines reform; as he states "the aim of reform was not to limit the power of Velayat e faqih (the rule of the jurist) but rather to make it accountable and answerable to law”<sup>138</sup> Negin Nabavi, argues that reformists are liberals at their best with

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<sup>136</sup> Barzin, Saeed. "Factionalism in Iran." *The World Today* 51, no. 10 (1995): 202-05. Accessed November 27, 2014. JSTOR.

<sup>137</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007. 175-283

<sup>138</sup> Nabavi, Negin. *Iran: From Theocracy to the Green Movement*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.39-54

no specific paradigm and a few set rules.<sup>139</sup> Mohammed Khatami, theologian and the president of Iran 1997-2005, was a reformist that tried to bring about change and liberalization into Iranian politics. According to Mandville, Khatami was opposed to clerical dominance. Khatami's introduction of liberal reforms included the appointment of the first Iranian female as a vice-president, encouraging the growth and activity of civil society. In addition, he opened up a sufficient space for youth reformists to be seen around the world.<sup>140</sup> Lastly, Khatami tried to improve the relationship of Iran with western countries; most notably the United States. In an interview with CNN, Khatami emphasized the importance of a "dialogue of civilizations", as he states:

"In terms of the dialogue of civilizations, we intend to benefit from the achievements and experiences of all civilizations, Western and non-Western, and to hold dialogue with them. The closer the pillars and essences of these two civilizations are, the easier the dialogue would become. With our revolution, we are experiencing a new phase of reconstruction of civilization. We feel that what we seek is what the founders of the American civilization were also pursuing four centuries ago. This is why we sense an intellectual affinity with the essence of the American civilization."<sup>141</sup>

However, Khatami's reforms were limited due to the struggle with the clerical establishment and the conservatives; as the clerical establishment began a series crackdown and arrests of pro-reformists. For example, legal action was taken against a pro-reformist mayor in 1998, reformists' publishing houses were closed. In addition,

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<sup>139</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007. 175-283

<sup>140</sup> Ibid

<sup>141</sup> "Transcript of Interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami." CNN. January 7, 1998. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html>.

while Iran helped the United States in its war against the Taliban; the United States labelled Iran as part of the 'Axis of Evil'.<sup>142</sup>

Lastly, Islamist rightist attempted to preserve the power of the clergymen and usually use anti-imperialist rhetoric to gain support. The hardliners opposed liberalization, improving relations with the US and individual rights to privacy as opposed to having a 'moral police'<sup>143</sup> Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, former Iranian president from 2005-2013, an engineer that was slightly different from the traditional conservatives. Ahmadinejad used populist revolutionary nationalism to appeal to the poor; promising them an improved standard of living. Ahmadinejad also gained a lot of support through his anti-Western rhetoric; mostly notably the holocaust denial, as he stated "They have created a myth in the name of the Holocaust and consider it above God, religion and the prophets,"<sup>144</sup>

### **iii. Conclusion**

While in Saudi Arabia it's quite complicated to illustrate the power of the ulama in the Saudi politics; it is clearly obvious that in Iran the religious clergymen are in power and that they are the main authority in Iran. In addition, while there are some challenges that had face the clergymen since the creation of the Islamic Republic; most recently the demands of liberal movements in Iran for more freedom and liberty; the clergymen have

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<sup>142</sup> Mandaville, Peter G. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007. 175-283

<sup>143</sup> "Iran's Conservatives and Reformers." *Strategic Comments* 4, no. 7 (1998): 1-2. Accessed November 27, 2014. <http://www.tandfonline.com.library.aucegypt.edu:2048/doi/pdf/10.1080/1356788980473>.

<sup>144</sup> Vick, Karl. "Iran's President Calls Holocaust 'Myth' in Latest Assault on Jews." *Washington Post*. December 15, 2005. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/14/AR2005121402403.html>.

succeeded in oppressing such movements. An example can be demonstrated in looking at the green movement, a movement that started in June 2009 as protest to Ahmadinejad's victory in the election. The green movement organized mass demonstration and called for civil disobedience until its crackdown in February 2010.<sup>145</sup> Iran's Shiite ideology had given it the essential legitimacy to survive until today and it had given it influence over many Arab states and Shiite communities in other regions.

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<sup>145</sup> Dabashi, Hamid. "What Happened to the Green Movement in Iran?" Al Jazeera. June 12, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/05/201351661225981675.html>.



## Chapter IV

### Religion and Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy

#### I. Introduction

This chapter aims to show the role of religion in Saudi foreign policy and how the Saudi state was able to use identity in order to eliminate rival ideologies such as Arab nationalism and communism. It also shows how the ideological development of fundamental extremist movements that were funded by Saudi Arabia and how it back-fired against the interests of Saudi Arabia.

According to the '*siyasa sharyyia*' doctrine, foreign policy lies under the responsibility of the King. However, throughout the past few decades, Islam has been widely used in Saudi foreign policy. The purpose was to maintain Saudi's prestigious status in the Islamic World and to preserve their own Wahhabi state ideology in an effort to protect the Al Saud monarchy from external ideological threats such as communism and Arab nationalism. As previously mentioned in the first chapter, Saudi Arabia considers itself as the 'Heartland of Islam' and justifies that it has kept Islam 'uncontaminated' because it has not been subject to colonial or foreign rule. According to Bahgat Korany and Moataz Abdel Fattah, Islam and oil are the two pillars of Saudi foreign policy.<sup>146</sup> Further evidence of this has been of feud by Prince Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, former ambassador to the United States, as he explained why Saudi Arabia should not be worried about the recent developments in the region; he state:

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<sup>146</sup> Hilal, Ali Al. *The Foreign Policies of Arab States the Challenge of Globalization*. New Rev. Ed., AUC Forum for International Affairs Ed., [3rd ed. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008.343-396

“Why is the Kingdom confident? For a number of reasons. Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam, a religion that today has an estimated 1.2 billion adherents. Saudi Arabia represents over 20 percent of the combined GDP of the Middle East-North Africa (and an estimated quarter of the Arab World's GDP, according to the latest IMF numbers), making it the economic engine of the region an effective partner and member of the G-20.”<sup>147</sup>

Furthermore, both Korany and Abdel Fattah show the importance of the religious *ulama* in Saudi's foreign policy. For example, in 2002 where a fatwa was issued by Grand Mufti Ibn Baz placing Israel in the category of *dar al-ahd* (covenant states) rather than *dar al-harb* (war states) which allowed crown-Prince Abdallah to offer a peace treaty with Israel in the Arab Summit meeting in Beirut. In addition, both authors argued that the religious *ulama* have on occasions had more influence on the masses than the heads of their governments.<sup>148</sup>

This chapter will discuss two particular cases where Saudi Arabia extensively used religion to promote its influence and identity and limit other ideological threats. The first case will analyze pan-Islamism in the first Arab Cold War and the second case will look at the creation of Jihadist movements in Afghanistan. In addition, this chapter will attempt to address the challenges that face the Saudi monarchy.

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<sup>147</sup> Al Saud, Prince Turki. "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy." *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 4 (2013): 37-44. Accessed November 27, 2014. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.library.aucegypt.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/mepo.12044/pdf>.

<sup>148</sup>Hilal, Ali Al. *The Foreign Policies of Arab States the Challenge of Globalization*. New Rev. Ed., AUC Forum for International Affairs Ed., [3rd ed. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008. 343-396

## II. *The Arab Cold War and the foundation of Saudi Pan Islamism:*

### i. **The threat of Pan-Arabism**

The Arab Cold War was a term coined by Malcom Kerr, to describe the inter-Arab conflict that symbolized by the rivalry between the United Arab Republic and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the late 1950's and 1960's. The conflict between the two regimes had split the Middle East (with the exception of Israel) into two camps; revolutionary Arab states that adopted a pan-Arab identity and the conservative monarchies that were determined to deter Arab nationalism. In addition, the Arab Cold War became a part of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States; with the Soviets supporting Egypt and its allies and the United States supporting the Saudi monarchy. The ideology of Arab nationalism threatened Al Saud's power and therefore the Saudi monarchy reacted by using pan-Islamism; an ideology that would later prove fruitful to Saudi foreign policy.

The Arab Cold War started shortly after Gamal Abdel Nasser became the President of Egypt in 1954. Abdel Nasser was one of the founding members of the Free Officer Movement; the movement that managed to overthrow King Farouk I through *a coup d'état* in 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1952. According to Joel Gordon, professor of history at the University of Arkansas, after the 1952 coup, Nasser was largely in control of the Free Officer Movement. In addition, even though Mohamed Nagib was the president of Egypt at the time; Nasser's popularity was rising among the people, as Gordon narrates "By the end of the "March crisis" Gamal Abd al-Nasser had clearly emerged to the public eye as the revolution's real leader...He appeared frequently in the press and was caricatured on the

cover of popular picture magazines as the personification of the new Egypt: pyramid builder, armor-shield against reactionary terror, football hero."<sup>149</sup>

Nasser's influence grew tremendously in Egypt and the Arab World after rising to power. He used an anti-imperialist, socialist and pan-Arab rhetoric to strengthen his legitimacy and to spread his influence throughout the Arab World. The Middle East was going through a period of decolonization and Egypt had played an important role in assisting liberation movements in Arab and African states (most notably in Algeria) Nasser believed in the influence of the media and, therefore, he established a radio station, *Sawat Al Arab* (Voice of the Arabs); which was influential in broadcasting pan-Arab messages and publicizing liberation struggles in the Arab and African World.<sup>150</sup> Nasser's call for Arab unity was so influential that it inspired other Arabs to dream about a unified Arab nation. He believed that Arab unity would help achieve glory and would defend Arab states against aggressors, as he states in a speech in July 26<sup>th</sup> 1957 "Our policy is based on Arab nationalism because Arab nationalism is a weapon for every Arab state. Arab nationalism is a weapon employed against aggression. It is necessary for the aggressor to know that, if he aggresses against any Arab country, he will endanger his interests"<sup>151</sup> Nasser's policies such as reaching an agreement with Britain in 1954 to evacuate Egypt and later the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 had led him to become an Arab

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<sup>149</sup> Gordon, Joel. *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006. 57.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid

<sup>151</sup> Jankowski, James P. *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.

Hero.<sup>152</sup> However, Nasser's peak of influence was reached in 1958 ; as he managed to successfully unite with Syria creating the United Arab Republic. In addition, Nasser's anti-Baghdad campaign had paid off as in 1958 the Free Officer Movement in Iraq had overthrown the British installed monarchy ; ending the Baghdad Pact.<sup>153</sup> According to Salem Yaqub, , in 1958 the Eisenhower administration admitted defeat in taking a tough stance against Nasser.<sup>154</sup>

The Al Saud monarchy was therefore deeply threatened by Nasser's rising power and his revolutionary pan-Arab ideology. At the beginning of Nasser's reign, Saudi Arabia maintained good relationships with Egypt; as both states signed a mutual defense agreement in 1954. In addition, Saudi Arabia halted oil exports to Britain and France during the Suez Crisis as a response to their aggression against Egypt in 1956. Nasser's public reception in Saudi Arabia worried the Saudi monarchy while his proposal for a unity between Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt was rejected. The Saudi monarchy viewed that Nasser's pan-Arab socialist ideology wasn't compatible with their rule of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi monarchy was also dissatisfied with Egypt's use of Saudi opposition to broadcast anti-Saudi sentiments. However, the situation escalated when a plan for overthrowing the Saudi monarchy by the Egyptian officers was foiled.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Gordon, Joel. *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.67-100

<sup>153</sup> Butt, Gerald. "Lesson from History: 1955 Baghdad Pact." BBC News. February 26, 2003. Accessed November 30, 2014. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2801487.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2801487.stm).

<sup>154</sup> Yaqub, Salim. *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.237

<sup>155</sup> Rasheed, Madawi. *A History of Saudi Arabia*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 112

In the late 1950's and early 1960's, Saudi Arabia witnessed several domestic problems that threatened the legitimacy of Al Saud. In 1956, King Saud faced mass protests in Dhahran, a Shiite majority city, as workers called for reform, closure of the Dhahran airbase and labor rights. In Najd, Saudi's first student organization called for reform and demanded the dissolution of the 'General Presidency for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice'. Furthermore, there were divisions and power struggles within the Royal family. King Saud and Faisal competed for power while a group of young princes called for reforming the entire Saudi system. Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, inspired by Gamal Abdel Nasser pan-Arab ideology, created the Free Prince movement that demanded the creation of a constitutional monarchy in Saudi Arabia. Prince Talal later formed the Arab Liberation Front which called for democracy, the abolition of slavery, overhaul of oil concessions and Arab unity against western imperialism.<sup>156</sup>

## **ii. Saudi Pan-Islamism**

As a result, the Saudi monarchy became increasingly aware of the need to contain Nasser and his Arab nationalism ideology as it threat against the Kingdom mounted. Nasser's brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt after the assassination attempt by one of its members in 1954 had led members of the Muslim Brotherhood to find refuge in Saudi Arabia and other gulf states. According to Angel Rabasa, members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia mainly worked as Imams in mosques, teachers and even officials in the Ministry of Education where they became responsible for designing textbooks and syllabi. Consequently, the Muslim Brotherhood's presence in Saudi Arabia

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<sup>156</sup> Rasheed, Madawi. *A History of Saudi Arabia*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.102-110

led the movement to become an agent of change in Wahhabism as they managed to spread their teachings throughout the Muslim World, and gave political inspiration to the rise of jihadist movements.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, two pan-Islamist organizations appeared in the 1960's: the Muslim World League and the Organization for the Islamic Conference.

*iii. Muslim World League (MWL)*

In May 1962, King Faisal established the Muslim World League, based in Mecca, in an attempt to counter pan-Arabism, socialism, communism, and to promote Islamism. The Muslim World League was a non-profit religious organization that aimed at funding education, publications and Islamic cultural centers. The World Muslim League did not only spread the Wahhabi ideology in the Arab region but also exported it throughout the Islamic World. The League for instance supported groups such as *Deobandis*, *Ahl-i Hadith* and *Jamaati Islami* in South Asia that aimed at combating Sufism. In addition, the *Izala Society* movement in Nigeria was created with the aim of wiping out ritual innovations.<sup>158</sup>

The launching of the Muslim World League started with the meeting of 111 ulama who were later joined by political activists. The League used the mosques under its supervision and control for religious education and preaching for Islam.<sup>159</sup> In addition, the League distributed religious books and provided scholarship opportunities in Saudi

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<sup>157</sup> Rabasa, Angel. *The Muslim World after 9/11*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004.99-112

<sup>158</sup> Commins, David Dean. *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009.18

<sup>159</sup> Landau, Jacob M. *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press ;, 1990..284-285

religious universities.<sup>160</sup> In addition, the Muslim World League managed to pressure states into giving more support for Muslim causes. The Muslim World League also had its own publications such as *Majallat Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami* (journal of the Muslim World League) in which they aimed to spread awareness about Muslim struggles to strengthen pan-Islamism solidarity. According to Thomas Hegghammer, the Muslim World League began largely apolitical; as it was more focused on establishing charity and development funds which worked on humanitarian aid and development of education.<sup>161</sup>

Later in 1972, the Saudis also established the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) that focused on raising awareness of the new generation against ‘false ideologies’ such as communism and pan-Arabism.<sup>162</sup> The WAMY spread through 65 states and its staff often exhibited extremist ideologies.<sup>163</sup> According to Commins, the WAMY distributed Muslim Brotherhood works of Sayyid Qutb and Abd al Qadir Awda.<sup>164</sup> Such movements led to the creation of new fundamental Wahhabi and global jihad movements through the late 1970’s and 1980’s.

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<sup>160</sup> Commins, David Dean. *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009.104-129

<sup>161</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 16-38

<sup>162</sup> Commins, David Dean. *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009.104-129

<sup>163</sup> Landau, Jacob M. *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press ;, 1990..284-285

<sup>164</sup> Ibid



*iv. Organization for Islamic Conference (OIC)*

According to Madawi Al Rasheed, , King Faisal used Pan-Islamism for three main purposes ; to promote inter-governmental cooperation, counter pan-Arabism, communism and contain the Soviet threat, and mobilization of Muslim countries for the Palestinian cause.<sup>165</sup> While Faisal established the Muslim World League; yet the league only worked on a grass root societal level and hence he needed another inter-governmental organization in order to reduce Nasser's influence in the Arab World. By 1969, Egypt's role in the Arab World had declined as a result of the defeat of Arab troops by Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967. In addition, Nasser's intervention in Yemen was, as he admitted, his own 'Vietnam'. Therefore, Faisal took advantage of Nasser's weakness and called for a Islamic Summit after the burning of Al Aqsa Mosque in 1969.<sup>166</sup> According to Landau, King Faisal had already been preparing for such a summit since 1965; where he met with many Islamic rulers such as the King of Morocco and persuaded them to create of a Muslim convention.<sup>167</sup> The first summit was held in Rabat in 1969, followed by 1970 summit in Jeddah where twenty three foreign ministers agreed to establish the General Secretariat of the Muslim League. The organization's objective were pan-Islamic and called for the solidarity of Muslims to protect them, as article II of the Charter stated:

“1. To promote Islamic solidarity among member states; 2. To consolidate cooperation among member states in the economic, social, cultural, scientific and other fields of

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<sup>165</sup> Rasheed, Madawi. *A History of Saudi Arabia*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.124-29

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Landau, Jacob M. *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press ;, 1990..287-303

activities...5. To co-ordinate efforts for the safeguard of the Holy Places and support the struggle of the people of Palestine...6. To strengthen the struggle of all Muslim peoples with a view to safeguarding their dignity, independence and national rights...”<sup>168</sup>

The OIC played an important role in supporting the Palestinian cause. For instance, it created a fund in 1972 for the ‘holy war against Israel’.<sup>169</sup> In addition, it also worked for the Afghan independence from the Soviet Union, assisted Muslim minorities and encouraged them to organize and to be better aware of their religion. The OIC also played a role in arming Afghan and Bosnian resistance and gave pan-Islamism a military dimension.<sup>170</sup>

### *Conclusion*

It is quite difficult to claim that Faisal’s pan-Islam ideology was more appealing to the Arab people than Nasser’s pan-Arab ideology. It can be argued that it wasn’t pan-Islamism that weakened pan-Arab ideology; rather external factors such as the Arab forces defeat in the six day war and the death of Nasser contributed to the fading of the pan-Arab ideology in the Arab world. In addition, Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel in 1979 made Sadat and Egypt widely unpopular in the Middle East and as a result Egypt was expelled from the Arab League and the Organization for Islamic Conference. However, Egypt’s decline had led to the rise of Saudi Arabia pan-Islamist ideology that had spread throughout the world. King Faisal’s popularity in the Islamic world was

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid

<sup>169</sup> Ibid..

<sup>170</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 16-38

unprecedented by any previous Saudi monarch and he became a symbol of Islamic politics. King Faisal's used a pan-Islam rhetoric in dealing with the Palestinian cause and had sent Saudi funds to arm the Palestinian resistance.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, the oil embargo that was placed by Saudi Arabia on Israel's allies for their assistance in 6<sup>th</sup> October/Yom Kippur war in 1973 had also helped Faisal gain a lot of admirers in the Arab World.<sup>172</sup>

### *III. Saudi Arabia and the formation of Jihadist Movements:*

The 1980's witnessed a new development for Saudi pan-Islamism with the appearance of jihadist movements. The jihadist movements began to rise in many armed conflicts in Muslim countries such as those in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Algeria, Somalia and Tajikistan in the 1980's and 1990's. In order to understand the development of jihadist movements; it is necessary to analyze the impact of Sayyid Qutb's ideology on jihad movements and the Muslim Brotherhood's role in the creation of the jihad movements.

As previously mentioned, the Muslim Brotherhood's presence in Saudi Arabia and participation in the MWL had an effect in altering the Wahhabi ideology by expanding its influence beyond the borders of Saudi Arabia. Yet, Qutb's work had inspired many followers of Wahhabism and paved the road to the creation of fundamental Wahhabi movements. Although, it must be noted that Qutb's views is not shared by all members of the Muslim Brotherhood; as some members of the Muslim Brotherhood disagree with Qutb's literature. It has been also noted that "The younger generation of Brothers are

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid

<sup>172</sup> Rasheed, Madawi. *A History of Saudi Arabia*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.102-110

more eager to engage in the Brotherhood in the political process and play by democratic rules...They regard Qutb as problematic, as something of an embarrassment”<sup>173</sup>

Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) was one of the leading figure heads in the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1950’s until his execution in 1966. Qutb was not a religious scholar; he received both traditional Islamic education and western education that he had received in Egypt, Britain and the United States. Qutb’s experience in the United States had left him fearful of the implementation of the vices of the American, namely secularism and materialism, in Egypt. According to De Long, Qutb believed that both secularism and materialism were the reasons behind the oppression, racism and lack of morality in the American society. Therefore, Qutb joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1940’s. With Nasser’s rise to power, Qutb was imprisoned and then executed in 1966. Qutb’s imprisonment and torture in Egyptian prison had led to his radicalization and this could be reflected in his most famous political work “milestones” that was published in 1964.<sup>174</sup>

De Long gives a good comparative analysis between the political thoughts of Sayyid Qutb and Ibn Abdel Wahhab in terms of religion and the state and jihad. Both Qutb and Ibn Abdel Wahhab call for the return to the direct interpretation of Qur’an and hadith and share the same view of Ibn Taymiya’s interpretation of Islam.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Sacirbey, Omar. "Is Muslim Brotherhood Shaped by 1950s Views? - USATODAY.com." USATODAY.COM. February 10, 2011. Accessed November 30, 2014. [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2011-02-08-Muslim-brotherhood\\_07\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2011-02-08-Muslim-brotherhood_07_ST_N.htm).

<sup>174</sup> Bas, Natana J. *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 227-280

<sup>175</sup> Ibid

However, both have different perspectives and view about *jihad*. Qutb views that jihad is necessary against non-Muslims and Arab secular ideologies such as pan-Arabism. Qutb's interpretation of the Qur'anic verses was literal interpretation and hence he desired to prove that while jihad had been limited during prophet Muhammed's life; it was a necessity or a *modus operandi* for Islam after his death. In addition, Qutb didn't believe that preaching would have a strong impact on changing society to follow true Islam and believed that armed struggle is the most effective method to let people accept the message of Islam. On the other hand, Ibn Abdel Wahhab believed that Islam should spread through education and awareness rather than using violence. Ibn Abdel Wahhab's interpretation of the Qur'anic verses and hadith were conceptual and therefore he limited jihad only in the case of 'self-defense' and opposed using jihad as a method for Islamic expansion.<sup>176</sup>

Therefore, in summary, Ibn Abdel Wahhab viewed the role of the state to be the protection and implementation of *shari'a* Law and stress on the adherence to monotheism. In addition, Abdel Wahhab didn't have any sentiments against Christians or Jews as they were considered people of the book and preached following the prophet's example of engaging in commerce with them. On contrary, Qutb believed that the state must enforce the Islamic belief while he had negative views on Christians and Jews as he believed they wanted to annihilate Islam.<sup>177</sup>

The development of the jihad movement in Afghanistan clearly illustrated the Muslim Brotherhood's influence in the creation of the movement. In 1979, Soviet troops had

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid

<sup>177</sup> Ibid

invaded Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia's support for Afghanistan started only as humanitarian and political in the early 1980's but it would soon develop into sending and arming the Afghan *mujahedeen* with the assistance of the United States. According to Hegghammer, the quest for jihad in Afghanistan started in 1981 by the Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Kamal al-Sananiri, the brother in law of Sayyid Qutb, as he visited Pakistan to assess the state of Afghanistan. Al- Sananiri managed to convince another Jordanian-Palestinian Brotherhood member Abdallah Azzam to join the fight against the Soviet Union. While al-Sananiri was killed in Egypt, Azzam had travelled to Pakistan and Saudi's first involvement in Afghanistan came through the Muslim World League and the MB.<sup>178</sup>

At the beginning of the war, from 1981-1984, only a few fighters had travelled from the Arab World ; most of those that went to Pakistan were aid workers and administrators for the Saudi Red Crescent and the Saudi Relief Committee. Yet, Azzam was able to mobilize many Arab and Saudi volunteers through publications such as the *karamat* (articles that presented stories of miracles that occurs to martyrs) , the issuance of fatwas on jihad in Afghanistan and the foundation of the Service Bureau which was an establishment that managed to arrange mobilization, get funds from and accommodate volunteers. By 1989, it was reported that 12,000-20,000 Saudi volunteers had joined the Afghani jihadist movement.

The Saudi government had largely contributed in the development of jihadist movements financially, politically and ideologically. From 1987-1989, Saudi Arabia had funded the

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<sup>178</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 16-38

Afghan *mujahdeen* with at least US\$1.8 billion; a financial support far greater than the aid the Palestinian received from 1978-1991 (US\$ 992 million) The Saudi government encouraged Saudi Arabians through non-governmental organization such as the Muslim World League, the use of government controlled media to broadcast messages from Afghan mujahdeen and publish fatwas on the participation in jihad in Afghanistan and even provided 75% discount on airline flights to Peshwar in Pakistan. <sup>179</sup>

However, Hegghammer points out that the contrary to the common misconception of Wahhabi ulamas' support for jihad in Afghanistan; the ulama didn't actively promote jihad in Afghanistan as most ulama adopted a vague position. This could be illustrated by examining Ibn Baz's fatwa on Afghanistan, where he stated "helping and aiding our fighting and exiled Afghan brothers is an individual duty on Muslims today, financially and physically or on of the two according to one's capability"<sup>180</sup> The fatwa doesn't explicitly declare jihad nor does it commit all Muslims to participate in Afghan war. Thus, this also illustrates the difference between the traditional Wahhabi movement that followed Ibn Abdel Wahhab's teaching on jihad and the neo-Wahhabi jihadist movement that were influenced by the ideology of Muslim Brotherhood Sayyid Qutb.

The establishment of the jihad movement proved in its early years to be a success for Saudi Arabia as it gave the regime a legitimate boost inside and outside the Kingdom. It also managed to raise pan-Islamist unity; as Nasir al Bahri, former body guard of Osama Bin Laden, narrates the reasons behind join the jihad movement

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid

<sup>180</sup>Ibid.,29

“Our basic motive in jihad was to defend Muslim lands. We were greatly affected by the tragedies we were witnessing and the events we were seeing: children crying, women widowed and high number of incident rape...Otherwise, what would make me leave Saudi-Arabia-am I am of Yemeni origin- to go and fight in Bosnia? The issue of nationalism was put out of our minds, and we acquired a wider view than that, namely the issue of the umma. The issue was very simple at the start, yet it was a motive and an incentive for jihad”<sup>181</sup>

However, the Saudi government never foresaw that the development of fundamentalist jihadist movements would later haunt them . The jihadist movements in Afghanistan had been influenced by more radical ideas during their stay in Peshwar and thus global jihad movements, that adopted a revolutionary Wahhabi discourse, began to rise. Such movement, such as *Al-Qaeda*, became hostile to Saudi Arabia and was responsible for a number of terrorist bombings in the Kingdom itself. Furthermore, the 9/11 terrorist attack had tarnished Saudis’ reputation as a leader of pan-Islamism and were accused of sponsoring terrorism; as Clinton’s leaked a memo stating” Saudi donors constituted “the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide”<sup>182</sup>

#### *IV. The Challenge of Pan-Islamism for Saudi Arabia: Global Jihad*

Global Jihad movements began to appear in the 1990’s as a result of the growing discontent of some Islamists with the failure to Islamize some secular states such as

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.61

<sup>182</sup> Jones, Owen. To Really Combat Terror, End Support for Saudi Arabia. August 31, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/31/combat-terror-end-support-saudi-arabia-dictatorships-fundamentalism>.



Egypt and Algeria, and the failure to pressure their own states to oust US military presence. In addition, the rise of other pan-Islamist causes, the Saudi crackdown on *Sahwi* intellectuals and jihadist and torturing them in prison contributed in giving such global jihad movements popularity in the Islamic World. Therefore, jihadist scholars thought that they have exhausted all non-violent methods of resistance and that global jihad should be tested.<sup>183</sup>

One of the most extreme jihad movements was *Al Qaeda*; which was founded by Osama Bin Laden. Initially, *Al Qaeda* didn't have a clear strategy but soon Osama developed two core elements by advocating the use of armed struggle against America and its allies, and and opting for the use of means of violence to protect the Islamic Umma from non-Muslim aggression.<sup>184</sup>

*Al Qaeda* founded support within Saudi Arabia through the rise of a new Wahhabi *al-Shu'aybi* school. The *al-Shu'aybi* school, as Hegghammer mentioned, wasn't a radical movement but a strict Wahhabi movement. The *al-Shu'aybi* filled in a theological gap that was left by the death of three top Wahhabi scholars: Ibn Baz. Nasir Al Din Al Albani and Muhammed bin Uthaymin.<sup>185</sup>

The writings of the *al-Shu'aybi* school contributed to the recruitment of jihadists from Saudi Arabia through their Wahhabi religious legitimacy. In addition, the *al-Shu'aybi*

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<sup>183</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010..99-112

<sup>184</sup> Ibid

<sup>185</sup> Ibid

assisted in fundraising for *al-Qaeda* through charitable organization; a tactic that was similarly used by the Saudi Arabian government to fund the Afghan *mujahdeen*.

The 9/11 terrorist attack led Saudi Arabia to revise its own pan-Islamist ideology and pursue stricter counter-terrorist measures, as the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the United States explained “Saudi Arabia has questioned more than 1,500 individuals, arrested hundreds of suspects, and succeeded in extraditing Al-Qaeda members from other countries to face justice. The Kingdom has audited its charities and enacted strict financial control measures to ensure that evildoers cannot take advantage of the generosity of our citizens. Bank accounts of suspected individuals have been frozen and some of the most stringent banking regulations implemented. Saudi Arabia today has some of the toughest counter-terrorism laws and regulations in the world.”<sup>186</sup>

v. *Conclusion*

This chapter has shown the success of Saudi Arabia in using its Wahhabi ideology to protect itself from other threatening ideologies and more importantly become a regional power in the Middle East. The Saudis were able to achieve this through the establishment of non-governmental organization such as the Muslim World League and other grass root organizations in different Islamic countries.

However, as illustrated throughout this chapter, the ideological merge of Wahhabism with the radical Brotherhood teachings and other radical Islamic movements had affected greatly Saudi’s foreign policy and pan-Islamist ideology. While traditional Wahhabism

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<sup>186</sup> "Counterterrorism." Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Washington D.C. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.saudiembassy.net/issues/counterterrorism/>.

remained dominant internally within the Saudi state; yet the Saudi-funded movements outside the Kingdom became more radical. Consequently, Saudi Arabia contributed in no small measure to the rise of global jihad and became the center of its intellectual history.<sup>187</sup> However, Saudi Arabia didn't account for the setbacks of its pan-Islamist ideology and did not predict the damages that such an ideology could have on the Kingdom and the Islamic World.

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<sup>187</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010..104

## Chapter V

### Religion and Iranian Foreign Policy

#### I. Introduction: Brief of Iran's Foreign Policy

This chapter aims to show the impact of religion on Iran's foreign policy after the 1979 Iranian revolution. Iran was able to spread its influence through transnational Shiite movements and its impact in the Middle East.

The Iranian Islamic government, inspired by its own revolution, had the desire to export its revolutionary ideology throughout the Islamic World. As mentioned before in Chapter 3, Ayatollah Khomeini called for the unity of the Islamic Umma regardless of the different sects that exist within Islam. Therefore, the Iranian Islamic government had pursued a different policy from that of the Safavid state. The Safavids were not keen on exporting Shiism ; as they were more concerned with protecting the new Safavid state from Sunni Ottomans while the Shiite *ulama* focused on literature on just ruler and had little interest in expanding Shiism.<sup>188</sup>

According to Suzanne Maloney, former U.S State Department policy advisor, Khomeini believed that exporting their revolution would be more effective if they were to use grass root societal and societal networks, as well as “through the dissemination of its precepts and the advocacy of its officials, citizenry and broader network of clergy”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Menashri, David. *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1990.

<sup>189</sup> Maloney, Suzanne. *Iran's Long Reach: Iran as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008.

Therefore, the Iranians had in the beginning resorted to the use of athletes, pilgrims, diplomats and officials to promote Iran's own image as protector of the Islamic World. In addition, Iranian officials appealed to the masses by using anti-imperialist rhetoric and constantly showed commitment to the Palestine cause. They also expressed support for Shiite minority groups in the Arab and Muslim World.<sup>190</sup>

The Iranians under Khomeini faced two obstacles when they opted for exporting their revolution towards other Arab and Muslim states. According to Oliver Roy, the first obstacle was the existence of a Sunni-Shiite divide. A series of repressive measures against Shi'as were carried out in neighboring states such as in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan when Saddam in Iraq and the Wahhabi movements in Pakistan and Afghanistan perceived a threat to themselves by a possible Shiite uprising. In addition, Saudi *ulama* issued fatwas that declared Shiites as *rafida* (abandoners); a term that is now popularly used by *Salafis* in reference to the Shi'a. The second obstacle was the disagreement within the Shi'i Twelver sect on *Wilayet al-faqih*; some traditional scholars such as those in Iraq disapproved of Khomeini's doctrine. Yet, Iran chose only to assist Shiite movements that adhered to the Iranian government.<sup>191</sup>

The death of Ayatollah Khomeini had an impact on changing the Iranian revolutionary approach. Former President Rafsanjani and later Khatami focused more on building

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<sup>190</sup> Mervin, Sabrina. *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran*. London: Saqi, 2010.29-45

<sup>191</sup> Ibid

Shiite movements rather than exporting the revolution itself. Therefore, this approach unified the Shiite movements and gave Iran more influence in the Muslim World.<sup>192</sup>

Iran's contribution in the revival of Shiism and the building of Shiite movements in post-Soviet Azerbaijan is an example of Iran's constructing Shiism policy. 60% of Azeri are Twelver Shiites. Azerbaijan was part of the Persian Empire yet it became part of the Russian Empire under Soviet rule until 1991. The Soviets banned the practice religion in the public sphere while they did placed no restrictions when practiced privately. The fall of the Soviet Union had produced an environment that was more favorable for religion and religion was practiced in the public sphere once again. As a result, a massive number of Azeri students travelled to Iran for theological studies and were concentrated on the schools of Khomeini and *Hojjatiyeh*. The students later became the main distributors of Iranian Shiite literature in Azerbaijan. Iran also sent Iranian missionaries to Azerbaijan; where they benefited from the weakness of the Azeri state and the rising demands of religious education, Furthermore, the Iranian embassy set up cultural centers and charitable foundations such as Imam Khomeini Aid Committee. Iranian influence was so tremendous that a political party, Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, advertised its adherence to Khomeini's doctrines. However, Iran's success was limited due to the fact that Azeri were mostly secularized and Turkish Sunni movements that competed for influence in Azerbaijan.<sup>193</sup>

The election of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad shifted Iran's foreign policy once again to become more revolutionary. Ahmadinejad's rise to power came mainly

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid

<sup>193</sup> Ibid167-193

from the support of religious clerics. his supporters were from religious communities. According to Haynes, Khatami claims that Ahmadinejad had received his support from the *Hojjatiyeh* Society, an ultraconservative Shia group that are anti-Baha'i and anti-Sunni), Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, the mentor of Ahmadinejad, and members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.<sup>194</sup> Accordingly, supporters of Ahmadinejad can be classified as revolutionary; they believe that the revolution shouldn't be subjected to reforms. In terms of foreign policy, they are strongly anti-Western and therefore hold sentiments against the US. In addition, the *Hojjatiyeh* Society, which its claimed that Ahmadinejad is a member of this group, emphasis on a connection between the group and the Mahdi; which is contrary to the belief of other rightist movements that view the Supreme Leader as the intermediary between the Mahdi and the people.<sup>195</sup>

Ahmadinejad's foreign policy was largely influenced by the revolutionary ideology of his supporters. While before Ahmadinejad's presidency, former governments had only been supportive of fundamentalist anti-regime groups in states; under President Ahmadinejad Iran became politically more involved in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Afghanistan and Yemen. Furthermore, Ahmadinejad's anti-Western rhetoric that was used multiple times showed his adherence to the *Hojjatieh* and other ultraconservative right movements. For example, Ahmadinejad accused the West of conspiring against Iran through planning a drought, as he states:

“Today our country is moving towards drought, which is partly unintentional due to

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<sup>194</sup>Haynes, Jeffrey. *Religious Transnational Actors and Soft Power*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012.110-115

<sup>195</sup> Nader, Alireza, and David E. Thaler. *The next Supreme Leader Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2011.15

industry and partly intentional, as a result of the enemy [the West] destroying the clouds moving towards our country and this is a war that Iran is going to overcome.”<sup>196</sup>

In another speech, Ahmadinejad accuses the United States of bullying other countries, while addressing the General Assembly; he said “Now even elementary school kids throughout the world have understood that the United States government is following an international policy of bullying”<sup>197</sup>

Lastly, Ahmadinejad referred to the Mahdi a several times in his speech domestically and internationally; which again shows the similarity between Ahmadinejad and the Hojjatiyeh Society. His speech at the UN General Assembly in 2012 clearly illustrates this, as he stated:

“Now we can see and sense the sweet scent and the soulful breeze of the spring, a spring that has just begun and doesn’t belong to a specific race, ethnicity, nation or a region, a spring that will soon reach all the territories in Asia, Europe, Africa and America....The arrival of the ultimate savior [a term Shi’ites use for the Mahdi] will mark a new beginning, a rebirth and a resurrection. It will be the beginning of peace, lasting security and genuine life,”

Iran’s new President, Hassan Rouhani, had been trying to improve relations with

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<sup>196</sup> Ghosh, Palash. "Ahmadinejad Accuses West Of Creating Drought Conditions In Iran." International Business Times. September 10, 2012. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.ibtimes.com/ahmadinejad-accuses-west-creating-drought-conditions-iran-781849>.

<sup>197</sup> "U.S. Hits Back at Ahmadinejad as He Labels America 'a Bully' While Thousands Protest That Iranian President Was Allowed to Speak during Yom Kippur." Mail Online. September 27, 2012. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2208884/Ahmadinejad-labels-America-bully-calls-threats-Irans-nuclear-program-non-issue-advance-oratory-performance-UN.html#ixzz3J58U9iTL>.



countries that former President Ahmadinejad had been hostile to, such as Saudi Arabia and the West. Rouhani enjoyed the backing of reformists in Iran and promised to ease sanctions imposed by the US and its allies. He pledged to introduce liberal reforms and lift some political restrictions.<sup>198</sup> Rouhani currently shows experience and maturity in foreign policy in handling Iran's nuclear program until his resignation. Referred to as the "diplomat sheik", Rouhani managed to reach agreement in the P5+1 meeting in Geneva to access \$4.2 billion in funds frozen as part of the financial sanctions while Iran promised to expand its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency .<sup>199</sup>

Looking at Iran's foreign policy; it appears that Iran becomes more radical when it is controlled by conservative elements. Under Khomeini and Ahmadinejad, Iran's role in the Middle East greatly increased while maintaining an anti-Western rhetoric. However, under Rafsanjani, Khatami and currently under Rouhani; Iran takes a more pragmatic stance while trying to move close to the West and quietly operates in building transitional networks.

The next section will discuss Iran's role in the creation of Hizbollah in Lebanon and Shi'a transnational networks in Gulf States. Furthermore, it will discuss the influence or impact both of movements on their state and how it affected Iran's image as a Pan-Islamist leader.

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<sup>198</sup> "Profile: Hassan Rouhani." BBC News. November 11, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22886729>.

<sup>199</sup> "P5 1 and Iran Agree Landmark Nuclear Deal at Geneva Talks." Russia Today News. November 24, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://rt.com/news/iran-historic-nuclear-deal-201/>.

## II. *The formation of Hizbollah:*

The most successful and most influential group that was created and supported by Iran is Lebanon's Hizbollah. Hizbollah, meaning the Party of God in Arabic, is a Shiite movement that was founded roughly between 1982 and 1985. The group started out as a small militia group that was formed in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War.<sup>200</sup> However, it is now possibly the most powerful political group in Lebanon and enjoys a lot of popular support in the Arab and Islamic World. Hizbollah has played an important role in resisting the Israeli occupation in Lebanon. In addition, It is currently playing a crucial role in the protection of Bashar Al Assad's regime in the Syrian Civil War.

Hizbollah is among the earliest Shiite groups that were prompted by the Iranian Revolution; as Ayatollah Khomeini's movement inspired their clerics. According to Naim Qassem, the Deputy Secretary General of Hizbollah, the ideology of the party originated from the ideas of three different Shiite clerics:

- a. Imam Musa al Sadr ,founder of the Shiite Amal Movement and the Supreme Islamic Shia Council in Lebanon,
- b. Ayatollah Mohamed Mahdi Shamseldin, former head of the Supreme Islamic Shia Council and founder of the Islamic University in Lebanon,
- c. Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, an influential Shiite *marja*

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<sup>200</sup> Fetini, Alyssa. "Hizballah." Time. June 8, 2009. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1903301,00.html>.

Qassem notes that Fadallah was a supporter of the Iranian revolution and had it partly played a role in the creation of ideological concept of the party, as he wrote in his book “He[Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah] was a symbol of many ideological concepts within the party, guiding Hizbollah through a mature vision of Islam and of the Islamic movement, supporting the Islamic revolution’s leader in Iran, Ayatullah Khomeini ”<sup>201</sup>

Therefore, according to Joseph Alagha, , the three constituent elements of Hizbollah ideology were adherence to Shiism, *Wilayet al Faqih* and *jihad*.<sup>202</sup> Hussein Al Musawi, a prominent member of Hizbollah, said that the religious ideology of the party dictated that they should establish an Islamic order based on *Wilayet al Faqih*.<sup>203</sup> The early leadership of Hizbollah, represented by Subhi al-Tufayli, its first Secretary General of Hizbollah, had believed that they should form a second Islamic State in Lebanon, as al-Tufayli declared:

“We [Hizbollah] consider the regime of Amin Jumayyel [the Lebanese president at the time] as one created by the Western imperialism to destroy the personality of Muslims in this country and to Westernise it. And we will not allow that...We should first defend

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<sup>201</sup> Qāsim, Na‘īm, and Dalia Khalil. *Hizbullah: The Story from within*. London: Saqi, 2005.

<sup>202</sup> Alagha, Joseph Elie. *The Shifts in Hizbullahs Ideology Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program*. Leiden: ISIM ;, 2006.19-68

<sup>203</sup> Mervin, Sabrina. *The Shi‘a Worlds and Iran*. London: Saqi ;, 2010.89-115

the Islamic Revolution and Iran before considering the formation of a second Islamic state in Lebanon”<sup>204</sup>

The Iranian-Israeli relationship had taken a turning point after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. In order to show Iran’s solidarity with the Palestinian cause; the Islamic Iranian government cancelled all trade agreements with Israel and until today did not recognize the state of Israel; often referring to it as the Zionist Regime in the international arena.<sup>205</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini previously described Israel as the “Little Satan”<sup>206</sup> and believes that “Israel should be whipped off the map”<sup>207</sup> The Israeli invasion of South Lebanon, a region which demographically had a Shi’ite majority, led to Iran’s intervention to protect the Shiite population in South Lebanon.

The Shiites presence in Lebanon can be traced back to the ninth century ; in an area known as Jabal Amil in the South of Lebanon and the north of Biqa’ Valley in the North east of Lebanon. The Shiites were an oppressed minority under the rule of the Mamlukes and Ottomans; however, they maintained a high status under Safavid rule. According to Alagha, the Shiites were once again marginalized and deprived in the new Lebanese

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<sup>204</sup> Alagha, Joseph Elie. *The Shifts in Hizballahs Ideology Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program*. Leiden: ISIM ;, 2006..36

<sup>205</sup> Latschan, Thomas. "Iran Und Israel: The Best of Enemies." Deutsche Welle. February 17, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.dw.de/iran-und-israel-the-best-of-enemies/a-17437981>.

<sup>206</sup> Rafizadeh, Majid. "Death to America, the Great Satan." Al Arabiya News. October 11, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2013/10/11/-Death-to-America-the-Great-Satan-.html>.

<sup>207</sup> Bronner, Ethan. "Just How Far Did They Go, Those Words Against Israel?" The New York Times. June 10, 2006. Accessed November 30, 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/11/weekinreview/11bronner.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/11/weekinreview/11bronner.html?_r=0).

state; as the Sunnis and Maronites held more power. Al Agha describes the living conditions of the Shiites post-1932 census of Lebanon;

“During that time the unjust economic distribution was clearly evident: famine, illiteracy, and deprivation characterized the rural peripheral regions inhabited mostly by the Shi‘ites, while Beirut was shining with an impressive apparent prosperity. Thus, Beirut blossomed and became a showplace of wealth and consumption, while the Shi‘ite slums became more crowded and expanded”<sup>208</sup>

The living conditions of the Shiites in Lebanon got worse with the increasing Israeli aggression against Lebanon in the late 1960’s and 1970’s as a result of Lebanese support of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The aggression and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that took part in the South of Lebanon had led to many Shiites in Lebanon relocating from their homes in the South and inflicted heavy economic losses on them. Furthermore, to make matters worse, the out-break of the Lebanese Civil War in 1976 witnessed the Maronites ‘ethnic cleansing’ campaign in Beirut which led the Shiites to move from East to the South of Beirut.

Imam Musa Al Sadr managed to organize and unite the Shiites of Lebanon and armed Amal Movement in order to protect the Shiites in Lebanon from the damages of the civil war and the Israeli aggression. In addition, Amal assisted the PLO against Israeli hostilities. However, Al Sadr disappeared in 1978 on a trip to Libya and clashes erupted between the PLO and Amal Movement. The relationship between the PLO and the

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<sup>208</sup> Alagha, Joseph Elie. *The Shifts in Hizballahs Ideology Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program* .24

Shiites grew so bitter that the Israeli Defense Forces were showered with handful of rice upon the invasion of South Lebanon.<sup>209</sup>

Iran had noticed the power vacuum in the Lebanese state as the result of the Civil War and Israeli invasion. From 1982 onward, Iran provided ideological, financial and military assistance for Hizbollah. Khomeini sent 1500 *Pasdaran* (Iranian Revolutionary Guards- Al Quds force) to Lebanon in order to train the Hizbollah militia-men. Therefore, Hizbollah would not have succeeded had it not been for Iranian support.<sup>210</sup>

Hizbollah's military successes in the resistance of the Israeli occupation; forcing the Israelis to withdraw from Lebanon in 2000 and later the prevention of another Israeli invasion in 2006; gave Iran more popularity in the Islamic world and a foothold with other Sunni movements . Consequently, Iran offered Hamas \$50 million in assistance and provided long term training assistance to Hamas's militia.<sup>211</sup>

Iran's image as a defender of Islam was greatly strengthened after Hamas was able to resist the Israeli military aggression against Gaza in 2006,2008,2012 and 2014. Iran's popularity in Palestine greatly increased; as in 2012 billboards were put across Gaza thanking Iran for arming Hamas.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid

<sup>210</sup> Ibid

<sup>211</sup> Maloney, Suzanne. *Iran's Long Reach: Iran as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008

<sup>212</sup> "Gazans Say 'Thank You Iran', for Missiles Used against Israel." Haaretz., 27 Nov.2012. Web. 10 Dec. 2012.

Hizbollah involvement in Lebanese politics has however shifted the party's ideology to grow less dependent on Iran and more independent on itself. As Alagha explained, the party's involvement in Lebanese politics had forced the party to shift from its Islamic state ideology that it once wanted to adopt to accepting the secular nation of the Lebanese state. This is partly because the party knew that promoting the Islamic state ideology would isolate the group politically while hindering its popularity internally; especially with other sects.<sup>213</sup>

However, it remains doubtful that Hizbollah have truly become independent of Iranian influence. Hizbollah's current involvement in the Syrian Civil War and the facilitating the passage of Iranian Revolutionary Guards to pass through Lebanon<sup>214</sup> to fight in Syria does show that Iran's influence has not decreased. However, it could be that both Hizbollah and Iran share the same concern about the rise of extremist Sunni movements such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Al-Nusra Movement and its effect on Alawites and the Shiite population in Lebanon and Iraq. Furthermore, Syria's President, Bashar Al Assad has been a close ally of both Hizbollah and Iran Hizbollah's rise had undoubtedly boosted Iranian influence in the Arab World.

### *III. Iran and the Shiite Transnational Networks in the Gulf; Bahrain*

Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 certainly ignited a spark of political unrest in both the states of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Demonstrations erupted only a few months after the Iranian revolution and had threatened the legitimacy of both Al Saud and Al Khalifa governments; particularly the Islamic Front for Liberation (IFL) was close to stage a coup

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<sup>213</sup> Mervin, Sabrina. *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran*. London: Saqi ;, 2010. 89-115

<sup>214</sup> "Lebanon Asks Iran to Explain Revolutionary Guards' Presence." *Al Arabyia*, 17 Sept.2012. Web. 10 Dec. 2012.

against the Al Khalifa monarchy. Iran's support to Shiite movements in Bahrain and Saudi was not as great as its support to Hizbollah. Yet, its revolutionary ideology had a great impact in stirring up events in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

The Bahraini and Saudi Shiites are 'original inhabitants' of their region; as modern Bahrain and the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia used to be a part of the ancient Kingdom of Bahrain (under the Carnathians) According to Laurence Louër, the Bahrainis were among the earliest supporters of Shiism in Arabia. However, after a series of conquests in the region; in 1783 Al Khalifa conquered Bahrain while in 1913 Abdel Aziz Al Saud managed to recapture the eastern province of Saudi Arabia.<sup>215</sup>

In Bahrain, growing opposition began to rise after the Religious Bloc was disbanded from the Parliament by the King in 1976. This led to the rise of the *Shiraziyyan*, a radical Shiite group, headed by Hadi El Mudarrisi. Mudarrisi had close ties with Ayatollah Khomeini which led him to travel with a group of his followers to receive military training with the PLO. Later, following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Mudarrisi declared that he was the representative of Ayatollah Khomeini in Bahrain. In 1980, demonstrations broke out in protest to the arrest of Sheikh Mohamed al Akri, a politically active Shiite scholar in Bahrain. The demonstrations were quelled and Mudarrisi was deported and stripped of his Bahraini citizenship. Yet, this didn't stop Bahraini activist from continuing with their struggle against Al Khalifa as they witnessed a much bigger demonstration in April 1980; the demonstration was violently dispersed leading to the death of several demonstrators.

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<sup>215</sup> Louër, Laurence. *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008. 11-41



The *Shiraziyyin* movement, a movement that was developed in Iraq by Ayatollah Mohammed al-Shirazi, under Mudarrisi proved to be useful to Iranians domestically and internationally. As most of the Shiraziyyin members were deported to Iran; many of its members promoted the Iranian revolution in Arab regions within Iran and outside Iran. Many *Shiraziyyin* members were employed as vigilantes in Khuzistan, an Arab province in Iran. Furthermore, the *Shiraziyyin* helped in setting up the first PLO embassy in Tehran. In addition, they also assisted in establishing the Office of Liberation Movements; its task was to coordinate and support or sponsor armed liberation movements against “oppressive rulers”<sup>216</sup>

According to Louër, the *Shiraziyyan* were ideologically close to the Iranian government and assisted heavily in trying to export Iran’s revolution in the Arab world, as Louër explains the close relationship between Iran and the *Shiraziyyin*:

“For the Shiraziyyin, Iran was not only a back base for political activities targeting their respective home countries, it was a country where they had the unique opportunity to put in practice their conception of the ideal Islamic Society.”<sup>217</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

Iran’s success can be mainly attributed to the oppressed state that Shi’as had been living in under some Sunni regimes such as in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Iran mainly used its Shiite identity to appeal to Shiites in the Arab and Muslim World and had gained a lot of acceptance of its message of its revolutionary message. However, Iran continues to face challenge of the Sunni-Shiite divide which undermines its capabilities of becoming the leader of the pan-Islamist movement. Despite its Shiite identity, Iran illustrated often its

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.178

willingness to support Sunni movements such as Hamas whenever the situation permitted.

## Chapter VI

### *The Iranian-Saudi Strife and the Outbreak of Division in the Middle East*

#### *I. Introduction*

The last three decades witnessed the development of political Islamist movements in the Muslim World. From the rise of moderate Islamist parties, such as the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) in Turkey and the *Nahda* in Tunisia, to the rise of extremist parties, such as Al Qaeda and ISIL ; they have all played a role in changing the identity and the political landscape of the Muslim World.

Political Islam was able to fill in the ideological vacuum that was left by secular ideas; as Arab, Persian and even Turkish nationalists had failed in achieving their objectives while the fall of the Soviet Union had ended Communism. Another important factor for the development of political Islam was the increasing support from Saudi Arabia and Iran to some Islamist movements; as they managed to create powerful movements such as the Afghan *mujahdeen* and Hizbollah.

The Islamists movements mainly enjoy support in the Muslim World for two main reasons; ideology and the provision of social services. In terms of ideology, according to Shadi Hamid, the PEW Survey on Religion and Public Life illustrated that large majority of Muslims in the Middle East take *shari'a* law very seriously.<sup>218</sup> In addition, the same survey showed that most Muslims that participated in the survey in the Middle East

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<sup>218</sup> Hamid, Shadi. "The Roots of the Islamic State's Appeal." The Atlantic. October 31, 2014. Accessed December 1, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/the-roots-of-the-islamic-states-appeal/382175/>.

practiced their rites of their own religion. Lastly, most of those that were surveyed in the Muslim World believed that it was necessary to believe in God in order to be morally good.<sup>219</sup>

Islamists rely on their social networks in order to be able to present social services to their community. This usually gives Islamist movements an edge over other secular movements. The Islamist *Nusra* front, for example, has been able to recruit more followers than the secular Syrian Free Army; as Murhaf Jouejati, a Syrian activist, commented on *al Nusra's* popularity "They continue to increase in popularity, particularly as they begin to implement social services."

**i. The Iranian Revolution and the Beginning of the Cold War:**

As previously mentioned in the first Chapter, Khomeini's Iranian Revolution had a direct influence on the Shiite population in the Gulf; hence the Shiites in the region, with limited Iranian assistance, managed to organize several political and social disturbances and instability in Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. This prompted Saudi Arabia to increase its funding in countering the Iranian threat; most notably sponsoring Saddam Hussein's war against Iran. In addition, according to Vali Nasser, Saudi Arabia wanted to hold Iran's advances in the region and therefore had contributed to spreading radical Sunni movements in Central Asia in an effort to contain Iran.<sup>220</sup> In the 1980's, several Sunni radical groups in Pakistan that were explicitly anti-Shiite, such as *Sepah e Saheban*, caused the rise of sectarian violence in 1985 between Sunnis and Shi'as. In

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<sup>219</sup> "PEW Research Center's Forum On Religion & Public Life The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society Survey Topline Results." PEW Research. April 30, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/04/worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-topline1.pdf>.

<sup>220</sup> Nasser, Vali. *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*. N.p.: n.p., 2007.

Afghanistan, the Taliban's capture of Kabul resulted in the massacre of Shiites in the city.<sup>221</sup>

To summarize, Eyup Ersoy, a Turkish political analyst, gives his incite about the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia; "The metaphysics of rivalry is as important as the physics of rivalry, and the most important variable determining the metaphysics of rivalry is the self-identifications of the parties. While the prevailing form of self-identification in Iran stresses that Iran is a non-Sunni and non-Arab country, one of the 'others' of Salafism as the prevailing worldview in Saudi Arabia is Shiism. This situation gives both sides the means to mobilize material and non-material resources more, to provide legitimacy more easily for their policies, to make the basis of their support more widespread, and to broaden the sphere of their policies. In particular, for Iran, Shi'a politics is an indispensable part of its struggle for regional influence and its rivalry with Saudi Arabia."<sup>222</sup>

In the past few years, the Middle East witnessed several phenomenon which came to be known as the Arab Spring. Such movements occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. Some movements succeeded in removing their authoritarian regimes, such as the revolutions that occurred in both Tunisia and Egypt. In Jordan, the King has taken several measures to reform the state after the eruption of mass demonstrations.<sup>223</sup> In Bahrain, the government suppressed mass demonstrations that took

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<sup>221</sup> Mervin, Sabrina. *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran*. London: Saqi ;, 2010.32

<sup>222</sup> Ersoy, Eyup. "The Rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East." *The Rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East*. Today's Zaman, 31 Dec. 2012. Web. 09 May 2013. <<http://www.todayzaman.com/news-302730-the-rivalry-between-saudi-arabia-and-iran-in-the-middle-east.html>>.

<sup>223</sup> "Jordan's King Calls for National Unity." Al Jazeera English. March 27, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/2011327203224334931.html>.

place in Pearl Square<sup>224</sup> Lastly, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen have all witnessed bloody conflicts between different factions with the support of foreign countries; distinctly Iran and Saudi-Arabia. Whereas the main objective of the Arab Spring was democracy, freedom and social justice; the Arab Spring took a sectarian course in Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

The Arab Spring has also resulted in the further development of Islamist movements; as more Islamist movements emerged to power in their own states. Consequently, in Tunisia *Al Nahda* Party, an Islamist political movement, became until recently dominant party in parliament.<sup>225</sup> In Egypt, Mohamed Morsy, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, won the presidential election in 2012.<sup>226</sup> However, such victories were short lived as *Al Nahda* Party lost their parliamentary dominance to the secular *Nidaa Tunis* whereas in Egypt that Islamists suffered a cruel fate after former President Mohamed Morsi was ousted from office by the Egyptian military following a popular uprising.<sup>227</sup>

Elsewhere, other jihad movements such as *Al Nusra Front* and *ISIL* appeared on the scene in conflict areas especially Syria and Iraq. These movements managed to recruit supporters from all around the world; providing military training to its volunteers.

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<sup>224</sup> Nyathi, Qhelile. "Away From Egypt, Bahrain's Own Arab Spring Uprising Heats Up Again." TIME. August 14, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://world.time.com/2013/08/14/away-from-egypt-bahrain-own-arab-spring-uprising-heats-up-again/>.

<sup>225</sup> Toumi, Habib. "Al Nahda Wins Historic Tunisia Elections." Gulf News. October 28, 2011. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://gulfnews.com/news/region/tunisia/al-nahda-wins-historic-tunisia-elections-1.919988>.

<sup>226</sup> "Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi Wins Egypt's Presidential Race." The Guardian. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/middle-east-live/2012/jun/24/egypt-election-results-live>.

<sup>227</sup> Zakaria, Fareed. "Why Democracy Took Root in Tunisia and Not Egypt." Washington Post. October 23, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/fareed-zakaria-why-democracy-took-root-in-tunisia-and-not-egypt/2014/10/30/c5205adc-606a-11e4-9f3a-7e28799e0549\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/fareed-zakaria-why-democracy-took-root-in-tunisia-and-not-egypt/2014/10/30/c5205adc-606a-11e4-9f3a-7e28799e0549_story.html).

Two states, Iraq and Syria, have for the past three years of the Arab Spring been affected the by Saudi and Iranian intervention in their domestic politics; causing a Sunni-Shiite sectarian war in both regions.

## *II. War in Iraq:*

### *i. **Brief History of Iraq and Ethnic Diversity:***

The Republic of Iraq is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse states in the Middle East. Consequently, Iraq has many different religious, ethnic and political ideologies. However, Iraq can be divided into three main factions: Sunni Arabs, Shiite Arabs and Sunni Kurds. According to Robert Siegel, , it is estimated that the Sunni Arabs compose of 17% percent of the population, Kurds (mostly Sunni) compose of 20% of the population and Shia Arabs compose 60% of the population.<sup>228</sup>

Iraq, earlier known as Mesopotamia, was one of the earliest civilizations in the world. Iraq had come under Arab control in 636 AD and it was later ruled by the Ummayyads. The city of Karbala in Iraq witnessed the battle between Yazid Ibn Muwayyi'a and Al Hussein; a decisive battle that divided both Sunnis and Shi'as. The Ummayyads were overthrown by the Abbasids and the second Abbasid Caliph Abu Jaafar Al Mansour built the city of Baghdad; making it the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Iraq was divided between the Ottomans and the Safavids; yet the Ottomans managed to defeat the Safavids and divided Iraq into three provinces; Baghdad, Mosul and Basra. The Ottomans ruled until the end of World War I; whereby Iraq became a British

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<sup>228</sup> Siegel, Robert. "Iraq's Demographics." NPR. April 14, 2003. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1232005>.

mandate and King Faisal I became the ruler of Iraq in 1921.<sup>229</sup> The Hashemite Kingdom was overthrown by a military *coup d'état* in 1958 by led by Abd-al-Karim Qasim and Abd-al-Salam Muhammad Arif. After a series of coups, in 1979 Saddam Hussein became the President of Iraq.<sup>230</sup>

ii. **Iraqi Shiites and the Iraqi-Iran War**

Saddam Hussien declared war on Iran only a few months after his presidency. He used his Ba'athist Arab nationalism ideology in order to win the support of the Arab Shiites while oppressing those that opposed his war against Iran. William Drozdiak, gives an explanation why Saddam was relatively successful in mobilizing some Arab Shiites in his war against Iran, "The apparent reluctance of the Iraqi Shiite majority, who form 55 percent of the population, to follow the politics of fellow believers in Iran reveals an abiding nationalistic distrust of their Persian neighbors and an intense disdain for the excesses of Khomeini's harsh fundamentalist rule... the political and military leadership in Baghdad have cast the war in terms of a struggle for national survival. As a result, the morale of Shiites in the Iraqi front lines has noticeably improved, say foreign military sources."<sup>231</sup>

However, Iran was able to establish an alliance with Iraq's oldest Shi'a Party, Al Daw'a Shiite Party, and created the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq(SCIRI) In addition, Iran assisted in creating and training the SCIRI's militant group; Al Badr. The Al Daw'a Party

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<sup>229</sup> "Iraq's History: An Interactive Timeline." Embassy of the Republic of Iraq Public Relations Office. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.iraqiembassy.us/page/iraqs-history-an-interactive-timeline>.

<sup>230</sup> "Iraq Profile." BBC News. September 16, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14546763>.

<sup>231</sup> Drozdiak, William. "Iraq's Shiites Enlist Under Saddam Hussein's Flag;" Washington Post Foreign Service, 20 Mar. 1984. Web. 9 May 2013.



had opposed Saddam's rule. Both movements took refuge in Iran. In 1991, a Shiite uprising in Iraq was severely crushed by Saddam Hussein's forces; leading to the exile of many Iraqi Shiite scholars to Iran.

**iii. The American Invasion, Iran and Shi'ite Dominance of Iraq**

In 2003, the American invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein shifted the balance of power from the Sunni to the Shi'ite. The first struggle witnessed in Iraq was within the Shi'a sect itself; as the Dawa'a and the SCIRI clashed with the Sadrist Movement. The Sadrist wanted to establish an Islamic state and they opposed the existence of US troops in Iraq. Whereas the Dawa'aa and SCIRI wanted to hold democratic elections while maintaining the autonomy of the south (Shi'a regions)<sup>232</sup> Oddly enough, Iran supported both parties. According to Ray Takeyh , the Iranians thought it would be an opportunity to support a charismatic leader that had influenced both the Shiite and Sunni population and an opponent to the American invasion.<sup>233</sup> While an official Iranian has claimed to have trained 800-1200 of the Mahdi army in Iran's embassy in Iraq.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Mervin, Sabrina. *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran*. London: Saqi ;, 2010.251-281

<sup>233</sup> Takeyh, Ray. "Iran's New Iraq." *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 1 (2008): 13-30. Accessed November 27, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org.library.aucegypt.edu:2048/stable/25482470?seq=12>.

<sup>234</sup> Mervin, Sabrina. *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran*. London: Saqi ;, 2010. .267

The United States had accused Iran of playing a double game as Iran trained and equipped Mahdi army, the militia group of the Sadrists, while also backing the Dawa'a and the SCIRI in their preparation for elections.<sup>235</sup>

After the conflict was slightly resolved between the SCIRI and the Sadrists in 2005; the religious Shiite United Iraqi coalition bloc (the political bloc of Dawa'a and SCIRI), headed by Ibrahim Jaafari, won the elections with 48% vote while the secular Shiite Iraqi National List Alliance, headed by Iyad Allawi, had gained 14% vote. The Sunnis Iraqi Accordance Front had boycotted the elections in protest to the American occupation of Iraq.<sup>236</sup>

#### iv. **Sunni Insurgence 2004-2014**

The rise of Shiite power led to the formation of Iraqi Sunni militant groups. Anthony H. Cordesman mentioned that in 2004 Sunni militants were divided into two groups; the old regime militants and neo-salafi militants. The old regime militias were secular Sunni that were composed of former police commandos and former army officers. While the neo-Salafi militas in Iraq, such as the *Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*, held a relatively new ideology that was influenced by Saudi Arabia.<sup>237</sup>

Hence, a sectarian conflict erupted between both the Shiites and Sunnis. According to Cordesman, the neo-Salafi movements were willing to use violence against Shiite non-

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid

<sup>236</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions About the Dec. 15 Iraqi Parliamentary Election." Washington Post. December 12, 2005. Accessed December 9, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/12/AR2005121200475.html>.

<sup>237</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H., and Emma R. Davies. *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008

combatants and saw that the Sunni insurgency was a part of a general war for the control of Islam; an ideology that was closely similar to traditional Wahhabism.<sup>238</sup>

Whereas Saudi government had a limited involvement in the first Sunni insurgency in Iraq; yet its estimated that 1500 Saudi jihadist travelled to Iraq in 2003.<sup>239</sup> Hegghammer notes that it is difficult to measure the impact of Saudi Arabia's involvement in the Sunni insurgency. Yet, in accordance to Cordesman's earlier statement, neo-Salafism was a foreign idea in Iraq before 2004. Therefore, it is possible that salafist jihadist in Iraq were influenced by Saudi jihadist.

In 2006, a group of 38 scholars from Saudi Arabia and Iraq met in Istanbul and issue of a declaration that encouraged anti-occupation and anti-Shiite jihad. Furthermore, Saudi scholar al Rahman al Barrak issued a fatwa that regarded Shiism as blasphemous.

However, Saudi's Grand Mufti rejected the anti-Shiite fatwas and the Istanbul declaration while calling for unity in Iraq and denouncing sectarian violence. Yet, Toby Craig Jones, professor of modern Middle East history at Rutgers University, comprehends that despite the declaration of the Grand Mufti; Saudis political leaders wanted an escalation of sectarianism in Iraq.<sup>240</sup> Lastly, Saudi has been involved indirectly in funding Sunni Islamists movements in Iraq. While the Saudi government denies any funding to Iraqi Sunni movements; yet the US-Iraq Study Group reported that the Saudi are a source of

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid

<sup>239</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions About the Dec. 15 Iraqi Parliamentary Election." Washington Post. December 12, 2005. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/12/AR2005121200475.html>.

<sup>240</sup> Jones, Toby. "Saudi Arabia's Not so New Anti-Shi'ism." *Middle East Report*, no. 242 (2007): 29-32. Accessed November 27, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org.library.aucegypt.edu:2048/stable/25164776?seq=4>.

funding Sunni insurgent. In addition, an Iraqi official reported that \$25 million of Saudi money went to a top Iraqi Sunni sheikh for the purchase of weapons.<sup>241</sup>

The Arab Spring intensified the Sunni-Shiite conflict even further in 2012. Since the evacuation of US troops; Sunnis have been heavily discriminated against; as they have been shut off from key jobs in government and universities while Shi'a banners spread all over Baghdad.<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, a report written by Al Jazeera asserted that detentions, torture, and executions targeted Sunnis under Prime Minister Maliki in Iraq; as a female Iraqi accounts her nephew's story in Iraqi prison "They beat him with metal pipes, used harsh curse words and swore against his sect and his Allah (because he is Sunni) and why God was not helping him, and that they would bring up the prisoners' mothers and sisters to rape them" <sup>243</sup>

The discrimination and the harsh living conditions that the Sunnis faced in Iraq led to the organization of mass demonstrations against Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. According to Colin Freeman, the Iraqis participants in the mass demonstration had a different motive than those that in other countries of the Arab Spring, as he reports; "The participants in Iraq's version of the Arab Spring have little in common with the cuddly, middle-class Facebookers who were the stars of Egypt's Tahrir Square. Many are tough tribal leaders and ex-Ba'athists, the same disenfranchised folk who formed an alliance of convenience with al-Qaeda during the US occupation to wage war on both the Americans

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<sup>241</sup> "Saudis Reportedly Funding Iraqi Sunnis." Washington Post. December 8, 2006. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/07/AR2006120701070.html>.

<sup>242</sup> "Shias Dominate Sunnis in the New Iraq." CBCnews. April 3, 2012. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/shias-dominate-sunnis-in-the-new-iraq-1.1269416>.

<sup>243</sup> Jamail, Dahr. "Maliki's Iraq: Rape, Executions and Torture." Al Jazeera English. March 19, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/humanrights/2013/03/201331883513244683.html>.

and Iraq's Shia community. They have weapons, militias and a decade of guerrilla know-how, not to mention potential backing from other Sunni states like Saudi Arabia."<sup>244</sup>

The Iraqi government would pay the price for its discrimination after the Sunni jihadist ISIL managed to capture the city of Mosul. According to a CBS news report, the Sunni majority residents of Mosul had welcomed the coming of ISIL; even one doctor said that they were better than the government.<sup>245</sup> A sub-chapter on ISIL will discuss later the establishment of the group, its objectives, history and relationship with Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia.

## *II. War in Syria:*

### *i. **Brief History of Syria and Ethnic Diversity:***

Similar to Iraq; the Arab Republic of Syria has multiple ethnicities and different religious sects. Syria has Arab as well as non-Arab ethnic Sunni groups such as Kurds, Turkmen, Circassians, Chechens, Bosnians and Albanians. Whereas in terms of religion, it is estimated that 74% of the population are Sunni Muslims, 11% Alawites, 3% Druze, 1% Twelver Shiites while other minorities such as Ismaili Shi'ites, Zayids and Christians are all less than 1% each.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Freeman, Colin. "Could Iraq's 'Arab Spring' Lead It Back to Civil War?" *Telegraph*. N.p., 25 Apr. 2013. Web. 09 May 2013. <<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/colinfreeman/100213926/could-iraqs-arab-spring-lead-it-back-to-civil-war/>>.

<sup>245</sup> Williams, Holly. "In Captured Iraqi City of Mosul, Residents Welcome ISIS." CBSNews. June 17, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/in-captured-iraqi-city-of-mosul-residents-welcome-isis>.

<sup>246</sup> Abu Shakra, Eyad. "The Sectarian Map of Syria." *Asharq Al Awsat*. September 1, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.aawsat.net/2013/09/article55315507>.

Syria is also another ancient civilization and it is estimated that Damascus, Syria's capital, has been built in 15000 BC. The Arabs took over Syria from the Byzantine Empire in 636 A.D while Damascus had later become the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate. Syria came under Ottoman rule in 1516 and would later become a French mandate after World War I. It gained independence of French rule in 1946 and after a series of political clashes; Hafez Al Assad, a secular Alawite Baathist, became the President of Syria in 1970. Since 1970, Syria has been under the rule of the Assad family; as Hafez Al Assad was later succeeded by his son Bashar in 2000.<sup>247</sup>

**ii. Global Jihadists and Syria:**

In 2010, Nibras Kazim had predicted that Jihadists will one day arrive in Syria causing instability in the region; as jihadist view the Syrian regime as the “perfect enemy”.

According to Kazimi the Jihadist view on the Alawite is similar to that of Ibn Taymiyya's views on Alawites. He saw the Alawites as a threat to the existence of Sunnis. In addition, Ibn Taymiyya issued three fatwas regarding the Alawites. First he claimed that the Alawites are an infidel heretic group. Second, he claimed that the Alawites couldn't be trusted as they have always allied themselves with the enemy of Islam. Third, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that Alawites should be fought.<sup>248</sup>

Syria has strategic religious importance for both Sunnis and Shi'as; due to the fact that it had witnessed the early struggles between Muwa'yyia and Ali Bin Abi Talib in the early years of Islam. In addition, Sunnis believe that the Mahdi will rise to lead the Muslim

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<sup>247</sup> Kazimi, Nibras. *Syria through Jihadist Eyes a Perfect Enemy*. Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 2010.17-23

<sup>248</sup> Ibid

World from Damascus, whereas the Shiites believe that the Syrians will stand against the awaited Mahdi.<sup>249</sup>

The rise of Hafez Al Assad to power in 1970 had created a sectarian conflict between the Sunni Islamists, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, and the regime. Sunni Islamists had resorted to violence after the 1973 constitutional amendments in which the Sunni Islamist thought that Assad was using secularism as a cover to promote Alawite dominance. After the assassination attempt on Assad in 1980; the Syrian government had launched a campaign of suppression against Sunni Islamist movements; which culminated in the annihilation of Islamists in Hama in 1982.

After Hafez Al Assad's death, a number of factors emerged to pave the way for the return of jihadists to Syria. While Hafez al Assaad was cautious not to tamper with the identity of the Sunni population; as he probably knew that it would to inflame more riots; Bashar Al Assad on the other hand allowed Iran's campaign of Shi'a proselytizing to proceed in Syria. In addition, the rise of Iranian influence in the region increasingly alarmed Sunni states such as Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia and other Jihadist movements.

The first calls for jihad came from Abu Mus'ab al Suri and Abu Baseer al-Tartousi. Al Suri called on Sunnis to become "guardians of the religion of Allah in Greater Syria" and protect it from the Alawites and deviating sects. Furthermore, Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, the founder of ISIL, outlined that one of the goals of jihad should be the wholesale annihilation of Shi'as and Alawites in preparation for fighting the West and Israel..<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.32-33

This led to the creation of Syrian jihad movement in May 2007. The *Jama'at altawhid wel jihad fi bilad alsham*, headed by "Abu Jandal", declared jihad against Bashar Assad and the Alawaites. Consequently, the first major terrorist attack took place in 27 September 2008; its intended target was the Seyyida Zeinab Shrine; most sacred Sh'ia shrine in Syria.

In March 2011, uprisings similar to the ones witnessed in Egypt and Tunisia erupted in Syrian cities. The uprisings started with demands for the “downfall the regime.” Yet, as Bashar Al Assad had used violent oppressive measures to silence the ‘revolutionaries’ ; armed militias started to rise into Syria. This led to an influx of Sunni jihadists and Shiite militiamen in Syria. Sawzan Hassan, a Lebanese journalist, provides a detailed summary of the events that occurred in Syria since the start of the uprising; “The Arab Spring in Syria started out with a dream of democracy, social justice, equal opportunity, and state institutions that fight corruption.... A new ideology, which had previously not found fertile ground in Syrian society, has entered the country. It is the jihadist and takfirist ideology (takfir is the practice of one Muslim declaring another Muslim an unbeliever). Making things worse were the violent methods used by the regime to deal with the protests from the beginning and the sectarian propaganda from all sides”<sup>251</sup>

The Syrian Civil War, unlike the Iraqi insurgence, is not purely a Shiite-Sunni war; as the war has grown more complicated with different factions, sometimes with similar ideologies, combating each other. The war witnessed combats between *Al Nusra* Front

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<sup>251</sup> Hassan, Sawzan J. "Where Will Islamists Lead Syria's Secular Revolution?" *Al-Monitor*. N.p., 18 June 2012. Web. 09 May 2013. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/contents/articles/politics/2012/08/where-will-the-syrian-revolution.html>>.



and FSA<sup>252</sup>, ISIL and *Al Nusra Front*<sup>253</sup>, ISIL and Kurds<sup>254</sup> and between the Syrian army with the support of Hizbollah with most of the factions existing in Syria.

However, the intervention of both Saudi Arabia and Iran in Syria deepened the sectarian rift. It caused majority Sunni states, such as Egypt under former President Mohamed Morsi, to declare jihad against Bashar's government and the Shiites. Sheikh Mohammed al-Arifi, a leading Saudi cleric, had called for jihad in Syria while preaching in Al Azhar mosque in June 2013.<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, former President Mohamed Morsi had expressed his aid to the rebels in Syria; while some Islamic clerics made anti-Shiite and anti-Iranian declarations.<sup>256</sup> Whereas Iran and Hizbollah sent troops/militiamen to Syria in order to protect the Assad government.<sup>257</sup> Hizbollah's initial reason for intervening in Syria, as claimed by Hassan Nasrallah, was to protect the holy shrine of Sayyida Zeinab

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<sup>252</sup> "FSA Leader Executed by Al-Nusra Militants in Syria's Deir Ez-Zor - ARA News." ARA News. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://aranews.net/2014/06/fsa-leader-executed-al-nusra-militants-syrias-deir-ez-zor/>.

<sup>253</sup> "ISIL Says It Faces War with Nusra in Syria." Al Jazeera English. March 8, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/03/isil-says-it-faces-war-with-nusra-syria-20143719484991740.html>.

<sup>254</sup> "Kurds 'repulse ISIL Push' in Syria's Kobane." Al Jazeera English. October 25, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/10/kurds-repulse-isil-push-syria-kobane-20141026192620718485.html>

<sup>255</sup> Fick, Maggie. "Egypt Brotherhood Backs Syria Jihad, Denounces Shi'ites." Reuters. June 14, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/14/us-syria-crisis-sunnis-brotherhood-idUSBRE95D0NL20130614>.

<sup>256</sup> Mohsen, Manar. "Egypt to Aid Syrian Rebels." Daily News Egypt. June 15, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/06/15/egypt-to-aid-syrian-rebels/>.

<sup>257</sup> Saul, Jonathan, and Parisa Hafezi. "Iran Boosts Military Support in Syria to Bolster Assad." Reuters. February 21, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/21/us-syria-crisis-iran-idUSBREA1K09U20140221>.

in Damascus.<sup>258</sup> However, in a bizarre move, Hizbollah announced the recruitment of non-Shiite volunteers in order to fight ISIL.<sup>259</sup>

#### V. *The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant*

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian born Sunni militant, established Al Qaeda movement in Iraq in 2004. Its main objective was to provoke a civil war between the newly dominant Shiites against the Sunnis and to fight the US occupation of Iraq. Al Qaeda had focused on suicide bombings that targeted Shiites and their sacred sites as well as the US occupation forces. The Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) had developed broader goals in 2007; as they aimed for defeating the United States and creating a Sunni-led Islamic State that could expand beyond Iraq's borders.<sup>260</sup> Whereas the US presence in Iraq had been successful in containing AQI; the US departure followed by the Syrian Civil War had strengthened the organization.

In 2013, ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), had announced its independence from Al Qaeda amid tensions that broke out between the two movements.<sup>261</sup> One year later, ISIL managed to capture Mosul in Iraq and all cities between Deir Ezzor city in Syria and the

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<sup>258</sup> Aziz, Jean. "Hezbollah Leader Defends Involvement in Syria." *Al-Monitor*. N.p., 6 Apr. 2013. Web. 09 May 2013. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/hezbollah-nasrallah-speech-involvement-syria.html>>.

<sup>259</sup> "Hezbollah Recruits Non-Shiites for ISIS Fight." *Al Arabiya News*. November 13, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/11/13/Hezbollah-recruits-non-Shiites-for-fight-against-ISIS-.html>.

<sup>260</sup> Naylor, David H. *Al Qaeda in Iraq*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009.

<sup>261</sup> Black, Ian, Rania Abouzeid, Mark Tran, Shiraz Maher, Roger Tooth, and Martin Chulov. "The Terrifying Rise of Isis: \$2bn in Loot, Online Killings and an Army on the Run." *The Guardian*. June 16, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/16/terrifying-rise-of-isis-iraq-executions>.

Iraq border.<sup>262</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency of the USA currently estimates that the number of ISIL militiamen ranges from 20,000 to 35,000.<sup>263</sup>

The relationship between ISIL and the Saudi Arabian government remains controversial to political analysts and journalists. Currently, there aren't enough documents or sources that could prove or deny Saudi support for ISIL. The Saudi Arabian government denies that it has funded and armed ISIL.<sup>264</sup> Whereas Iraq's former Prime Minister, Nour Al Maliki, accused Saudi Arabia of funding ISIL. In addition, a Qatari official stated that "ISIS has been a Saudi project."<sup>265</sup> However, it's certain that private donors from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have funded ISIL because they strongly believe in the need to counter the Iranian threat.<sup>266</sup> In addition, Saudi volunteers have taken part in the conflict with ISIL. However, Saudi Grand Mufti issued a fatwa stating that ISIL are terrorist group and that the Saudi people shouldn't join ISIL.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Yan, Holly, Salma Abdelaziz, and Raja Razek. "Floodgates Open as ISIS Bridges Victories between Syria and Iraq." CNN. July 9, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/08/world/meast/syria-civil-war/index.html?iref=allsearch>.

<sup>263</sup> "The CIA Thinks ISIS Could Have Nearly 32,000 Fighters." Business Insider. September 11, 2014. Accessed December 1, 2014. <http://www.businessinsider.com/cia-islamic-state-2014-9>.

<sup>264</sup> Black, Ian. "Saudi Arabia Rejects Iraqi Accusations of Isis Support." The Guardian. June 19, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/19/saudi-arabia-rejects-iraqi-accusations-isis-support>.

<sup>265</sup> Clemons, Steve. "Thank God for the Saudis: ISIS, Iraq, and the Lessons of Blowback." The Atlantic. June 23, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-saudi-arabia-iraq-syria-bandar/373181/>.

<sup>266</sup> Black, Ian. "Saudi Arabia Rejects Iraqi Accusations of Isis Support." The Guardian. June 19, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/19/saudi-arabia-rejects-iraqi-accusations-isis-support>.

<sup>267</sup> Black, Ian. "Saudi Clerics Declare Isis Terrorism a 'heinous Crime' under Sharia Law." The Guardian. September 17, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/17/saudi-clerics-fatwa-declares-terrorism-heinous-crime-sharia-law>.

## *Chapter VII*

### *Conclusion*

It is largely naïve to assume that identity is the only reason for the creation of the Saudi-Iranian cold war. There are numerous other important factors that led to the rise of the Iranian-Saudi struggle. An example could be that both have different rival allies; Iran is supported up by China and Russia while Saudi Arabia is supported up by the USA. Another factor could be the oil struggle between both Saudi Arabia and Iran; as both countries rank first and second respectively in terms of oil reserves. Additionally, the fear of loss of sovereignty over Shiite majority areas of Saudi Arabia or the Sunni or Arab majority areas in Iran could threaten the loss of their natural resources and thus lead to an political and economic loss. Lastly, it could be an ethnic struggle between Arabs and Persians for supremacy in the Middle East.

However, by using constructivism to analyze the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran ; the ontology can be used to explain the origins of the conflict between the two states and can also clarify how each state was able to use its own ideology to expand its foreign interests<sup>268</sup>. As Wendt mentioned, the variables of interest to constructivist scholars have a certain social meanings. He explains that social meaning is built from a specific combination of history, ideas, norms, and beliefs in order to explain state behavior.<sup>269</sup> Therefore, throughout this paper, it was important to analyze the identity of

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<sup>268</sup> Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>269</sup> Wendt, Alexander. "Constructing International Politics." *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995): 71-81. Accessed November 30, 2014.

each state. In addition, it was also important to analyze Islam and the origins of political Islam as the two states identify themselves as 'Islamic States'

Constructivists believe that the perception of allies and rivals, in-groups and out groups, are key determinant of a State's behavior.<sup>270</sup> Hence, this would explain the shift in relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran from alliance to rivalry. As previously mentioned, Iran and Saudi Arabia were close allies during the reign of the Shah.

However, with rising of Ayatollah Khomeini to power, the identical clash between the two states had changed the alliance into a rivalry. This rivalry took a religious discourse and therefore revived the Sunni-Shiite conflict in states such as Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain and Syria.

The pan-Islamist competition for leadership between the two states, the promotion of their own religious sects and voicing disapproval and antipathy for the other sect had spread the struggle in the Arab World and fuelled past rivalries between the Sunnis and Shi'as in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. Therefore, the main drive for the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the religious identity that both states maintain and such ideologies had a role in dividing the Middle East even further.

Constructivists also stress on the 'logic of appropriateness'; where rationality is heavily mediated by social norms.<sup>271</sup> This could explain the changing nature of the Iranian-Saudi relationship through analyzing their domestic politics. The Saudi state is currently ruled

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<sup>270</sup> Slaughter, Anne. "International Relations, Principal Theories." Princeton University. Accessed December 1, 2014.  
[https://www.princeton.edu/~slaughttr/Articles/722\\_IntlRelPrincipalTheories\\_Slaughter\\_20110509zG.pdf](https://www.princeton.edu/~slaughttr/Articles/722_IntlRelPrincipalTheories_Slaughter_20110509zG.pdf).

<sup>271</sup> Ibid

by the King and the Wahhabi *ulama*. Both are deeply opposed and threatened by 'Islamic Shi'ite State of Iran' and therefore their policy of containment has remained unchanged since the Islamic revolution. While ideological changes in Iranian had led to a change in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The hardliners or conservatives in Iran ignite the Saudi-Iranian rivalry while the pragmatists and reformists ease the conflict.

Lastly, constructivists recognize the importance of the role of non-state actor in international relations.<sup>272</sup> Constructivists believe that transnational actors can shift the states belief or influence a state's behavior and vice versa. This can be illustrated when looking at the changes of the Wahhabi ideology that was adopted by Saudi Arabia. The Muslim Brotherhood had an impact in radicalizing the Wahhabi ideology and therefore a direct influence in creating jihadist movements that started in Afghanistan. In addition, the Wahhabi religious institutions and pan-Islamist organizations that were funded by Saudi Arabia certainly had an impact on changing the behavior of states. Furthermore, such movements had an enormous effect in the creation of radical Islamist terrorist movements such as ISIL. It also provided such movements with the ideology, funds, volunteer and equipment.

The creation of jihadist movements' by Saudi Arabia was initially to serve as a political and ideological tool to eliminate Saudi's rivals such as Iran. However, such movements had ideologically developed and turned against the Saudi monarchy. Therefore, even if

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<sup>272</sup> Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998.

the Saudi state did not intend or support to create ISIL; it had built its ideological background indirectly. In addition, the state failed to control the amount of Saudi citizens that take part in funding and participating in the war; thus forcefully involving the state into the conflict.

Shi'ite transnational organization had proved to be successful in expanding Iran's role in the Middle East and the Islamic World. Organization such as Hizbulloh managed to gain mass support from both Sunni and Shi'ite followers while other movements managed to dominate or challenge Sunni rule in different states.

In conclusion, this paper shows the importance of religion and identity in the Middle Eastern region; as most of the struggles that were witnessed in domestic or regional politics were ideological. Therefore, it's natural that the greatest struggle within Islam had become the biggest struggle in the region led by Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite Iran.

However, it would be interesting if the two states experience their own 'Arab Spring' or a regime change would occur in one of those states; how would this affect the relationship between the two states? Will the Sunni-Shi'ite conflict cease to exist? Will this lead to the end of conflicts in the Middle East? Such answers could only be left for the future generation to answer.

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